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ISSUE
5

COMIC BOOK
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FATHOM
REBORN

SUMMER OF
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MAKING MOVIES
THE MARVEL WAY

JOE HILL and
GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ
LOCKE & KEY

Eric Esquivel
and Steven Grant

FREELANCERS

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BCM #5 Introduction by Rich Johnston

San Diego Comic Con! It's the Mecca of all comic book conventions. If you call yourself a comic fan, then at some point you owe it to yourself to make it to the show. Admittedly that means a thirty second lottery to get in line for tickets, and then finding vast sums for travel or hotels – but you can always hitchhike and/or sleep under the stars with the rest of the crowd in line for Hall H through the night. You'll end up with lifelong friends and the wif's not bad either.

Some people complain that it's all films and games now, but there is more comic programming at San Diego than anywhere else in the Western world. You make the show what you want it to be, from dawn to dusk spotlight panels on the greatest comic book talent in the world, panels that count towards college coursework, and discovering the talent of tomorrow, just starting out in Artists Alley.

Of course for those who can't make it, the Bleeding Cool website will be doing our best to keep you up-to-date with the latest announcements, gossip, and bleeding cool stuff being sold and shown on the show floor.

I'll be around somewhere... if you see me, say hi! Though please excuse the jet lag...

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LIFE IN THE GUTTERS

By Rich Johnston

Writers are often asked one repeated question from their readers... "Where



do you get your stories from?" Alan Moore said that it's probably the most repeated question, but also one of the most

important, as no writer really knows. Which is why Alan worships a Roman god exposed as a fraudulent puppet back in the second century. Well, the ideas have to come from somewhere.

I have an easier answer, because I know exactly where my stories come from. Usually from disaffected creators from corporate comics publishers, either annoyed at the kind of stories they are being told to create, frustrated with their fellow workers and not finding any other way to express that, or much more likely these days, exasperated that the company marketing machine is choosing to promote other people's work and not theirs. Especially when they really believe they have something important to say.

Companies crack down on leaks, of course. But I've often found that the more executives push down on creators and editorial, the more leaks seep out of the side.



But some of the biggest stories I've run on Bleeding Cool and Lying In The Gutters have come straight from the top, executives who just want to tell me stuff for shits and giggles, and then see exactly what happens.



photo by ponds.com

That's the thing. A good story can come from the Executive President or someone working in Accounting. Sometimes it can be a reader, a retailer, or a receptionist. Sometimes it may be the only bit of comics industry insider information they have ever received in their lives, and they pass it on. And, safe in anonymity, can give their fellow readers a peek behind the curtain of the comics industry that they love so much.

There are many who speak out against such practices, of course. But I'll let you in on a secret. Some people with the most negative things to say about Bleeding Cool have been really good sources. They just need "cover." And hey, with stories like these, I'm happy to give it to them.

So yes, anything you come across at San Diego Comic Con? I'm happy for you to whisper it across...

*Got a tip for Rich? You can contact him, or any Bleeding Cool contributor, with story tips, comments, questions, or to ask about advertising at: **BleedingCool.com/contact***

*At the top of each article in Bleeding Cool Magazine, you'll find a shortURL that will take you to the online hub for that topic. You can use that link to share with your friends, or to join in the conversation at the Bleeding Cool online discussion forum: **BleedingCool.com/forums***

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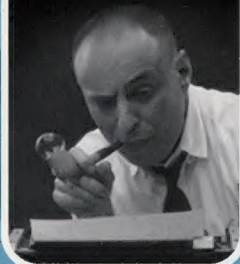
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The Haunting of Hill's House

by *Gavin Lees*



THE HAUNTING OF HILL'S HOUSE

by Gavin Lees

Haunted houses have long cast a chilling shadow over Gothic fiction. From *The Castle of Otranto*, through Poe's *House of Usher*, to the Overlook Hotel in Stephen King's *The Shining*, they have been the imposing, crumbling manifestations of our darkest, most repressed fears. To that pantheon, we can add Keyhouse — the towering mansion at the heart of writer Joe Hill and artist Gabriel Rodriguez's *Locke & Key* series. Winner of an Eisner award and a British Fantasy Award, the comics have become a landmark in the horror genre.

In August, *Locke & Key* enters its endgame with the final, two-part story arc, "Alpha." It's increasingly rare for a smart, inventive series like this to stay the distance, but *Locke & Key* has managed not only to reach a mature conclusion, but also to build its audience over the course of its run. Expectations are understandably high for a satisfying end to the tale, and the creators are determined not to disappoint. Gavin Lees spoke to its co-creator, Rodriguez, about the magic behind the scenes and what we can expect from these final issues.

A MINGLED YARN

For those unfamiliar with the series, *Locke & Key* revolves around the Locke children, who return with their mother to their ancestral home in Massachusetts, following the violent murder of their father. The move is an attempt to forget the tragedy and rebuild their lives in the idyllic New England surroundings. The fact that the house is in a town called Lovecraft, however, should have been their first clue that their situation was only going to worsen. As the children — eldest brother Tyler, his 16-year old sister Kinsey, and kid brother Bode — settle into their new home, they begin to discover strange keys with unnatural powers attached to them; keys that can turn them into ghosts, or literally unlock their heads. They also unleash a demon from the well-house — the malevolent, gender-shifting Dodge, who appears to be the reincarnation of their father's school friend, and gradually insinuates himself into the children's lives. As ever more keys are uncovered, the secrets behind Keyhouse are slowly revealed, as is Dodge's plan for unleashing a new dark age upon an unsuspecting world.

So you might think — some plucky kids ward off evil using magic powers, so

what — but *Locke & Key* transcends its plot entirely to become something much more thoughtful and complex than your average supernatural slasher.

Firstly, it's really a family drama. The Locke children are cut from whole cloth, and struggle in a believable way with their grief amid the abundant other pressures of adolescence. As Hill pithily puts it, "The real subject that everyone studies in high school is them-

selves," and so it is that we explore Tyler, Kinsey, and Bode's development through their own eyes. Cramming for exams, unrequited romance, and party peer pressure play as large a role in the comic's drama as the horror, making us care deeply about the characters. But also their viewpoint can be a source of horror, as we see through the eyes of misfits, alcoholics, and grief-stricken depressives, making the world seem grotesque and ab-

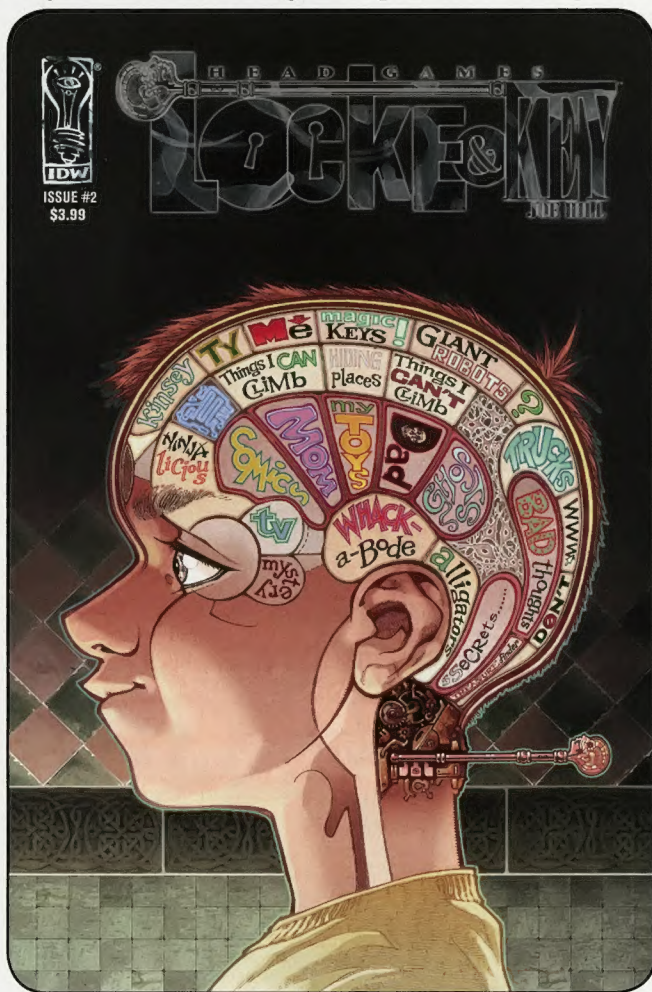
surd. This is a far cry from the paper-thin characters who provide target practice for Freddy, Jason, Jigsaw, and their ilk. This deep, emotional resonance inspired the style of Rodriguez's art, which may seem jarring to readers used to getting their thrills from the Vertigo roster. "It was inspired by Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* and several European comic artists," the artist explains,

"the idea was to create a very detailed environment and very simple characters, to create a sort of 'everyday world' feeling in which the magic and horror elements or situations will pop out more dramatically, and to give room in the real world for the family drama to evolve and character development to happen."

As a result, the characters seem very expressionistic, practically made out of

putty, and ready to be shaped and molded by their experiences. This was a deliberate move on the creators' part as, just like putty, the characters harden over time. "I started working with more expressionist, exaggerated features, and then slowly turned the design and look of the characters more realistic — especially the kids — as they grow up and leave childhood behind to take their first steps in adulthood." For Rodriguez, it was these elements —

rather than any of the numerous monsters he gets to realize — that provided the greatest difficulty when drawing the book. "The most challenging drawing task is when you have to deal with some emotionally stressing sequences for days, when you have to play with subtle elements to drive dramatic turning points of the story, as it was with the mother, Nina's story in the final



chapter of *Crown of Shadows*. I think that issue has been one of, if not the most, exhausting issue to solve in the whole run of the series." In return, Hill's own conceptualization of the characters has strengthened: "I've learned about as much about the characters from the way Gabe draws them," he quips, "as from anything I've ever put in the script."

ALL STRANGE & TERRIBLE EVENTS ARE WELCOME

Keyhouse, the Locke's mansion, as well as being the primary setting for much of the story, is also its most subtle character. Given that the house has been built upon by generations of the family, its look is completely unique, merging Victorian, medieval, and art nouveau details into an architectural cacophony, much like the real-world haunted mansion of the Winchester family. Appropriately enough, Rodriguez originally trained as an architect as a way into comics and illustration. "My training gave me lots of tools to play with in storytelling and space time representation," he explains, "it helped me to develop a strong sense of the integral relationship between design and the representation of space. This helped in creating consistent worlds for the stories, and believable, appealing realities for the readers."

Often that fastidious attention to detail and concrete reality would interfere with the story, however. "A few times when Joe wrote a bathroom, a door or a window where they weren't, completely ignoring the design of the house." So, the artist produced an incredibly detailed plan of the entire house to solve any of these issues in the future, allowing the visual designs to become the basis for the design of the story, bringing



JOE HILL • GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ

LOCKE & KEY





art and writing together in an incredibly elegant manner.

Aside from the realism that it brings to the series, the house serves a much greater, thematic purpose. The story takes place in a town called Lovecraft, which is a none-too-subtle nod to Hill's literary forebear, who was fond of architecture and used it to great effect in his work — think of the impossible vistas of *Unknown Kadath*, or the supernatural geometry of the Witch House. Through this connection, it implies that the Lockes' fate is of their own making, their own hubris, and their own short-sightedness. By limiting the supernatural to the realm of the children, the house distinguishes past from present, reinforcing modern values that privilege childhood imagination over prosaic maturity. In that fantasy conjured by the magical keys, we find many haunting reminders of past transgressions. The repressed guilt of "old money" is all-too-event in the key that changes the holder's skin colour, while others examine the limitations of reason, virtue, and fidelity in tempering the passion and violence at the heart of the family unit.

MINISTERS OF FATE

In many ways, the success of *Locke & Key* is an act of alchemy, as the collaboration between Hill and Rodriguez has become greater than the sum of its parts. Hill has cited the synergy between Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely as the level that he had hoped to achieve in his comics career (he is also a novelist and short-story writer of considerable acclaim) and that he was amazed to find it so quickly with his co-creator on this series. Rodriguez describes the relationship as being sibling-like, "We've reached a point in which we have guessed each other ideas about the evolution of the story or characters — sometimes with

really creepy coincidences — and I like to think that's consequence of how solid the universe of *Locke & Key* has become, and how consistent the characters are too. You reach a point in which both start evolving and acting according to their own nature, so you start 'guessing' the next logical move. And the other point of the evolution regards how we've been creatively feeding each other."

Consequently, the duo arrived at a shared vision of how the story would develop very early on. Thanks to the success of the early issues, and the support of IDW, it allowed them to play a very long game with *Locke & Key*, with many mysteries introduced in the early issues that would be resolved by the story's end. Rather than cinematic, their thinking was what you might call "televisual," looking to the successes of serial format for how to unfold a mystery, and avoiding the pitfalls of *Lost* and *The X-Files* who never seemed to know when to quit asking questions, and when to start answering them. "Joe, who's very aware of giving proper room to the different parts of a story's structure," Rodriguez tells us, "planned this so wisely that we had almost all the 'mystery' elements of the story solved and answered

by the end of Vol. 5, *Clockworks*, to leave proper space for an epic action-driven ending to the saga in Vol. 6."

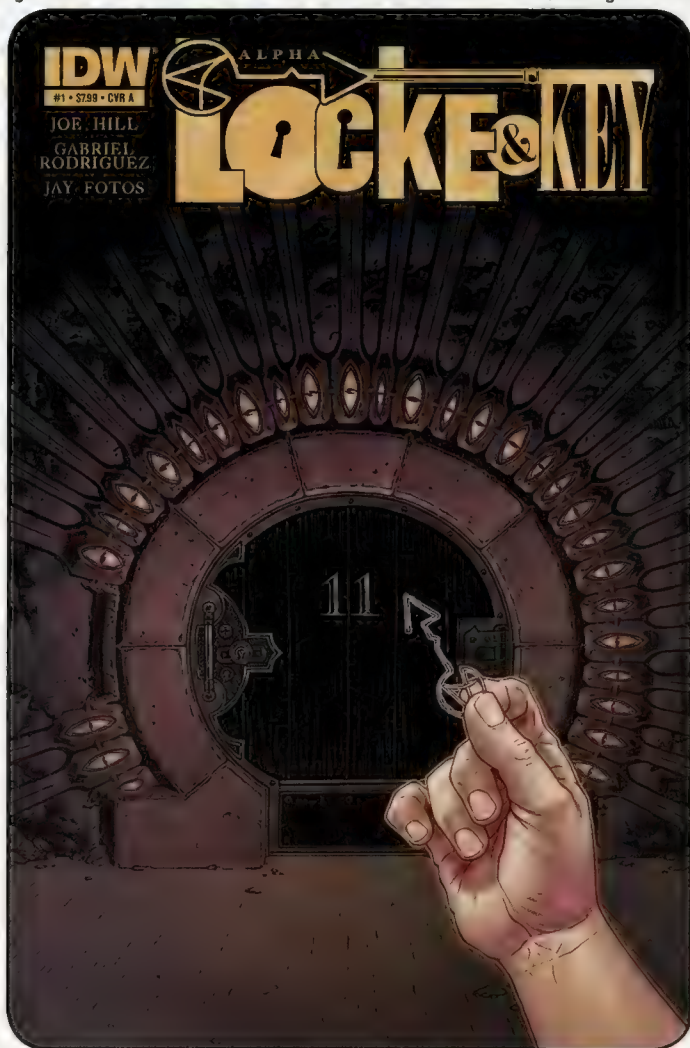
VIOLENT DELIGHTS HAVE VIOLENT ENDS

As the creators prepare for the release of that epic conclusion, there is a sense of bittersweet excitement; of not being quite able to let their creation come to a close. Thanks to IDW, they were able to expand the

final two issues to 32 pages, effectively adding another issue to the series. Without spoiling any of the secrets waiting to be unveiled within, Rodriguez promises that we can expect "epic drama in the final confrontation, and lots of casualties, some quite surprising ones — we never promised happy endings." That final remark does not seem to bode well for the Locke family, and it seems that the artist himself was not prepared for where the story

would go. "Despite the fact that we've discussed the way to get to the ending of the story a couple years ago, when I read the last two scripts I was shocked by Joe's last surprises and plot twists."

With the end of the current saga, however, it does not necessarily mean the end for Keyhouse and its secret passages.



Readers have already glimpsed some tales from its history in the "Grindhouse" one-shot (wherein Rodriguez adopts a loving homage to Bernie Krigstein's style) and the "Open the Moon" short-story (in a pitch-perfect imitation of Winsor McCay,) and can look forward to more: "We have specific plans for several one-shots, and maybe even a couple miniseries. This material, alongside the single issues we've already published (and will not be published in any of the six volumes of the Locke kids' saga), will become a seventh bonus volume, entitled *Locke & Key: The Golden Age*. We have an idea settled in the Victorian era, a WWII tale, and maybe we won't even stop there."

Given their practically symbiotic relationship, Hill and Rodriguez plan to continue their partnership outside of this universe, too. On the horizon is a superhero project with one of the big two, which should be on the shelves before the end of the year before they return to more creator-owned work in 2014. Separately, Rodriguez is looking at another project for IDW with a different writer: "I'm really hoping that will happen, 'cause that one might be,

for several reasons, incredibly fun and special, too." While Hill has a new novel out entitled *NOS4A2*, he still can't shake the comics bug and will be writing a prequel comic to accompany it entitled *WRAITH*. For Hill, comics are an addiction that fuel his creativity and play to his strengths as a writer, "Because comic books are all about forward motion. Every comic book has the gas pedal pushed to the floor."

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FREELANCING GUNS

Eric Esquivel Interviews Steven Grant

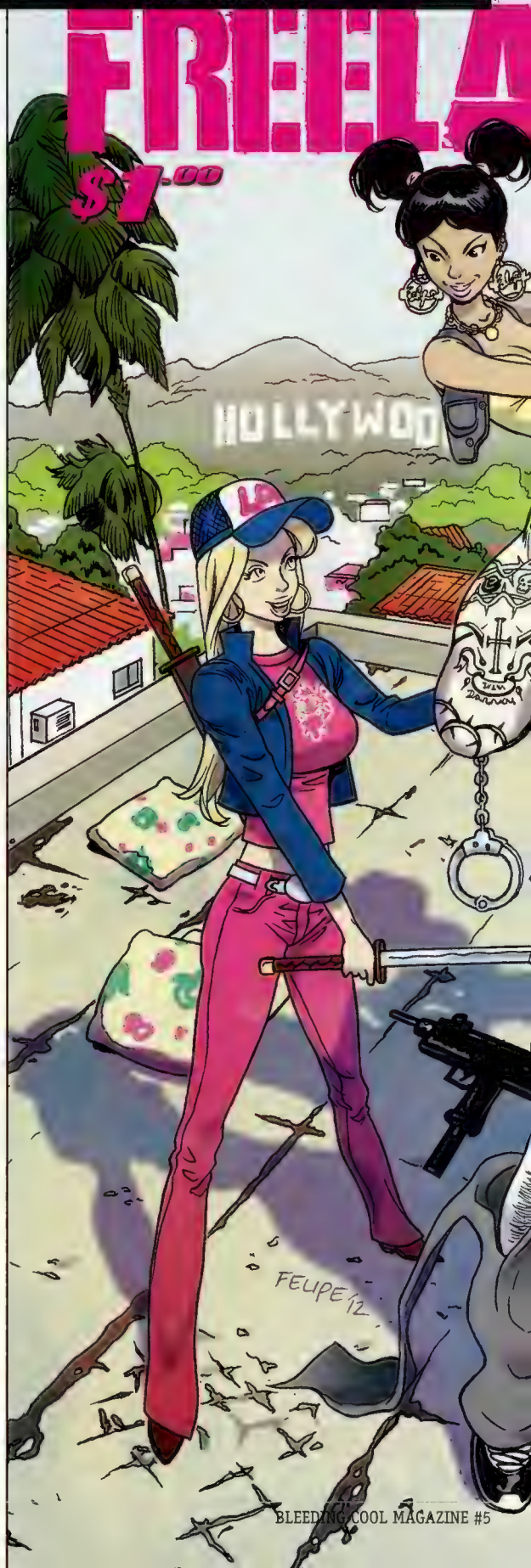
Eric Esquivel is living the dream. He's the new kid on the block at BOOM!, working on the *Freelancers* series, and a guy who is very passionate about comics. And we had the opportunity to bring his youthful enthusiasm to a candid conversation with Steven Grant, a legend in the comics community and the creator of *2 Guns*, a soon to be major motion picture starring Mark Wahlberg and Denzel Washington. The resulting conversation is something akin to a cross between *The Odd Couple* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Join us as we find out why Grant's favorite genre to write is crime, uncover the secret to his pitch for the *3 Guns* sequel, and why Lee Harvey Oswald was one of the biggest influences in his conspiracy laced world view.

ESQUIVEL: The highlight of my Calgary Comic and Entertainment Expo experience was when I called home to check in with my lady and the first thing she said was "Have you embarrassed yourself in front of Steven Grant yet?"

I've been a fan of yours for decades, I'm proud as Hell to work at the same company as you, and I'm honored to be having this conversation today.

So, yeah I guess I'll start things off with: your crime stories are these intricately plotted, infinitely complex little worlds populated by relatable characters, each with their own idiosyncratic voice and code of honor. They're tightly wound clockwork universes whose outcomes are shocking upon first viewing, and seem inevitable upon the second.

As a guy who grew up on mindless 90's action flicks, I have to ask--what are your influences? *2 Guns* seems like it shares more DNA with *Yojimbo* and *The Outfit* than with *Bad Boys*.



ANCERS

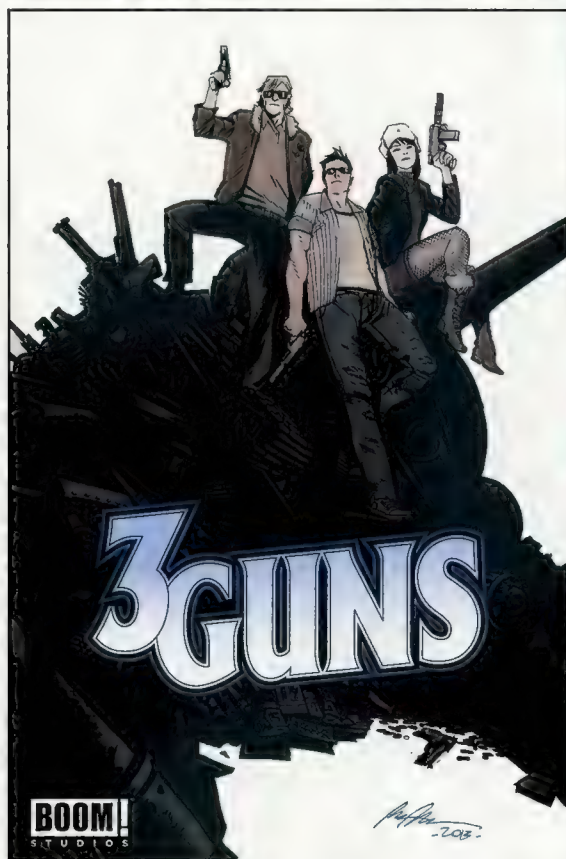
ROOM!

STUDIOSS



GRANT: I have a theory about influences, that nobody really knows what their influences really are, they only know what they want other people to think they are. That said, I was asked about influences in an interview a long time ago, and the big ones I could think of were Phil Ochs and Lee Harvey Oswald. Not that I've ever felt any compulsion to imitate Oswald in any way, but whether he pulled the trigger or not, he completely altered my worldview. That shot blew open the door to secret underworlds, conspiratorial paranoia, and a generally darker sense of reality than I'd been privy to before. I had just turned 10 when John Kennedy was assassinated and it took a while for everything to filter into consciousness, but my general worldview bloomed from that incident, and I wasn't alone. Phil Ochs was the guy who taught me that words could be assault weapons. The interviewers thought I was kidding when I cited them as influences, but I was and am serious.

But films play a huge part. I grew up in Madison WI, which had a lot of movie theaters and a major university rife with film societies, so by the time I was 17 I was seeing maybe 5, 6 films a week. I saw all kinds of things but was especially drawn to crime films: *Touch Of Evil*, *Out Of The Past*, *Pickup On South Street* and as many Sam Fuller films as I could see, and that continued through three years of college. I've never actually seen *The Outfit* (*Yojimbo* I saw, but perversely my preference runs toward its doppelganger, *A Fistful Of Dollars*, but *Yojimbo* was stolen from Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* anyway, so there you go) but there were a lot of other great crime movies coming out in the '70s. *Performance*. *Charley Varrick*. *Get Carter*. *Cotton Comes To Harlem*. *The American Friend*. Millions more, I think. I was saturated in the stuff. I read some



crime fiction but much of what's considered great crime fiction doesn't do it for me at all, but I was in love with crime movies. What I figured out before too long was that the best ones weren't just telling stories, they were expressing worldviews, and despite being on the surface very serious, most had a level of very dry humor, plots tended to revolve heavily around irony and characters being caught up, often by their own design, in circumstances way beyond their controls, where random elements throw whole machineries into chaos. Its great appeal is that it's a literature of losers, where even victories fall between tainted and pyrrhic. I was deeply, deeply saturated in that stuff, and if it's done cleverly it's still the type of film I'd most watch. After a while of writing professionally, once I'd gotten past the first blush of just finding people willing to pay money for things I'd written, I realized it was the kind of material I wanted to write. It fit my worldview.

E That "literature of losers" line is solid gold.

G That's the main difference between superhero stories and crime stories: superhero stories are all about winners, and crime stories are all about losers. Losers are more fun to write about, since they're allowed a much broader range of response to any given situation.

E I'm glad you brought up how much your worldview affects the material you've written. As a fan of your work, I've always liked that--even though you're working in genres that are classically very Manichean--you never use violence as a means to resolve conflict. In fact, it always exacerbates things. There's this great bit of dialog in *Punisher #1* (1985) wherein you have Frank say to Jigsaw and his cronies "You're cornered. Trapped. The circle of blood that's surrounded you all our lives is closing in on you"--and we realize by the end of that issue that the same sentiment holds true for Frank, when, in the third act, you set up the son of one of Castle's fallen enemies as his new foil. And in *2 Guns* it's a "good guy" following orders and shooting someone who his superiors presume to be a "bad guy" that fouls everything up.

G I do use violence to resolve conflicts in my stories a lot, but they tend to be rather unpleasant resolutions, and generally don't accomplish a lot. I noticed awhile back I tend not to think in terms of three-act structures. My natural structure is to set as many characters as the story can comfortably hold in decaying elliptical orbits around each other, so their paths all cross at weird angles and in constantly shifting arrangements, with a few falling off along the way, until at the end everyone left ends up in the same place, they all start shooting, and whoever's left standing at the end is the

hero of the story. This is mostly a rejection of the popularly-held “steady state” theory of heroism. Heroes are thought to be innately heroic, and doing un-heroic things is contrary to their nature. I don’t buy it. I think heroism is a confluence of situation and personality, and on one day someone might behave heroically but the next might behave very badly. It doesn’t diminish the heroic thing they did, it doesn’t elevate or justify the un-heroic. It’s just how people are. We tend to accuse heroes who behave like people of having feet of clay, but who doesn’t?

In *2 Guns* there’s very much an issue of how you tell the good guys from the bad guys. The answer, of course, is that all answers to that question are provisional.

E Is that theme something you plan to explore further in *3 Guns*? What’s the elevator pitch for that one?

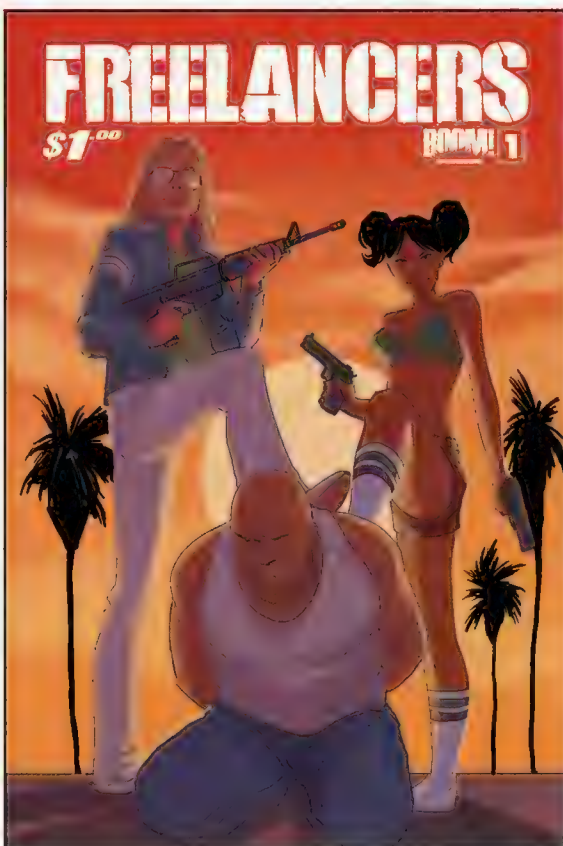
G It’s an underlying premise of the series, yeah. Think about undercover cops. Undercover cops are essentially authorized con men. Is lying to and manipulating everyone around you to achieve your ends really better if you think your ends are noble ones? And if you’re in a milieu where you’re pretending you’re someone you’re not, how do you know if someone else you’re dealing with isn’t doing the same thing?

Fortunately, when I was pitching it, I didn’t have to come up with any more of an elevator pitch for *3 Guns* than “it’s the sequel to *2 Guns*.” It takes place some months after the events of *2 Guns*, Marcus and Bobby remain on the outs with their former employees – maybe – and haven’t seen each other in that time either. But their pasts catch up with them as they’re recruited, respectively, by a Russian munitions smuggler and an American radical militia group cutting a deal with him, with all sorts of subterfuge going on, and they

find themselves pitted against each other. In *2 Guns*, Bobby and Marcus resort to partnership because it’s their only shot at survival. In *3 Guns*, they don’t have that. Neither can be sure of the other, what he’s really up to or who he’s really working for, and neither can afford to believe anything the other says. Complicating things is a “third gun” neither of them is aware of.

Basically, the idea in *3 Guns* is if you’re dealing with someone you know has been trained to successfully lie to your face until it’s second nature to him, how smart is it to believe anything he tells you? In my head, I always saw *2 Guns* as an anti-buddy movie. *3 Guns* takes that concept to the next level.

E During that same trip to Calgary wherein you and I first met, Paul Jenkins said to me that the current incarnation of BOOM! feels like the Marvel Knights crew felt in the 90’s. There’s a real sense of--not to be too pretentious here--of people being aware



that they're at the right place at the right time...and you are a huge part of that. BOOM! gets a lot of credit for breaking in new voices--young guns like me, Sam Humphries, Max Bemis, Si Spurrier, Caleb Monroe...but they'd be in no position to do that if it wasn't for you. Your name brings legitimacy to the brand--it's like a trusted seal of approval. And the transmedia success of *2 Guns* brings in all manner of attention--from press, to producers, to retailers, to, just, the average fan.

Not to inflate your ego any more than I already have--but I assume that you've pretty much got the pick of the litter when it comes to publishing companies. I know why BOOM! was always my first choice, but I'm interested in your history with the company. Care to shed some light on how/why you and Ross joined forces?

GI wish it were true I have my pick of companies, but the truth is we're in an era where comics publishing, at least on paper, has become very restrictive both creatively and financially. Most publishers have very narrow ranges of material they're interested in, and, you know, it's fine to work for Marvel and DC – in fact it's probably a good idea – if all that interests you creatively is not only superhero comics but superhero comics done exactly the way they respectively prefer them done. That gets a bit tedious after a while. Many smaller publishers are equally as restrictive about what they want, which is usually horror comics, only with worse financial terms, and these days it seems the smaller the company the worse the terms. Even after nearly 40 years now of fights for creator rights in comics, by and large creators remain the grunts of the business, and many end up with very little to show for their efforts, while publishers offer lip service “creator owner” contracts that may seem to invest the creator with rights but attach control of those rights to the publisher ad infinitum, and often with onerous exit strategies that do allow the creator to regain all rights – if they pay back every cent the publisher ever spent in any way on the property. The amount of nonsense out there is phenomenal. So I don't know, maybe I could walk in anywhere and say “Here's a book, publish it,” but I'm not eager to find out. In many cases it's a dead end with no creative or career upside.

Ross and I both go back to Malibu Comics and knew each other through that. I'd run into him at conventions and we'd shoot the bull. We were always friendly. One San Diego he tells me he's starting his own comics company and





at some point would like to do something with me when he gets a little established. Normally I snicker at anyone who says they're doing a comics startup because few of them understand the snake pit they're hurling themselves into, but I knew Ross at least knew the business, and he impressed me by making it clear he had no intention of asking creators to underwrite his publishing ambitions with free work. So we kept in touch and I watched him, and it didn't take me long to figure out that Ross wasn't interested in being a small publisher, and he wasn't interested in being Marvel. He wanted Boom! to be a boutique publishing house.

There are two parts to that. One, while obviously he has to keep some eyes on market considerations and he'd be an awfully stupid publisher if he didn't, he wanted to encourage talent to do the kind of material they were most eager to do. In my case, that was crime comics, and not just crime comics but my particular take on crime comics. That may sound like a little thing but it's harder to come by than it should be, and I don't mean just for me, I mean for anyone.

Two, Ross offered something a publisher had never offered before. Most these days offer "participation," which in the overall scheme of things usually amount to bread crumbs tossed to the pigeons if there are ever any bread crumbs to toss, but Ross offered a full partnership. Not in the company, of course, but in my corner of it. He also outlined what he was going to do to justify his part of it. It was a radical enough shift from how comics publishing is usually done that I couldn't not try it. It was an impressive pitch, and the worst I could do out of it was get a crime comic published. So I tried it. To paraphrase Viv Stanshall, fate played the straight man and since then we've never looked back. It worked out well for both of us, mainly because Ross knew what he was doing all the way along.

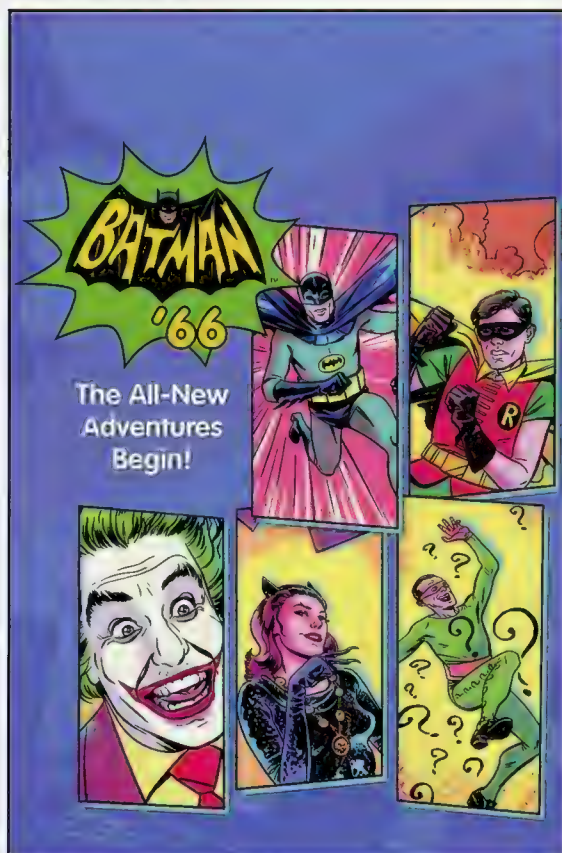
EI'm a relative newbie in this business (I've been puttin' out comics for eleven years, since I was fifteen, but my first Diamond-solicited works *Blackest Terror* and *Thor: Unkillable Thunder Christ* came out just a couple years ago), so it's nice to hear my confidence in the BOOM! crew echoed by someone of your caliber. Comics can be a pretty shady business, and people aren't always who they seem at first blush. I'm fortunate to be able to phone up the expert on con men and double-agents and have him vouch for my employer's authenticity. Thanks, Steven.

THE PULL LIST

by James Kuhoric

A hhh...summertime. As people roll out their grills for cookouts, vacations, and holidays, the comic world focuses on big screen blockbusters and major events at multiple publishers. It's convention season here in comics, and the creators are out in force peddling their wares to the faithful attendees at San Diego Comic Con and beyond. This is traditionally the time when we get the most powerful editorial stories being published and judging by the comics listed in *Previews*, this year will be one of the best. Start your summer right with some of the biggest comics on the horizon and these special gems I've added to the pull list...

BATMAN 66 #1



Holy Batusi! Break out the Bat-Shark Repellant and crank up the classic Batmobile! Are you really telling me that

DC is making a comic book series based on the Adam West TV series from the 60s? All those fan favorite actors and their classic performances as the Rogues Gallery are coming to comics with all the BAM! BIFF! POW! you can handle? Jeff Parker and Jonathan Case have the extremely enviable job of crafting stories that harken us back to a simpler era, when heroes and villains could fight to the most recognizable superhero theme song ever created. If you don't feel like a kid again just looking at the cover art for this series, there is truly no hope for you. This is the comic book I'm personally most looking forward to this summer!

Love It: If this is done right, it will be a magical trip back to a time when comics were just plain fun.

Hate It: Batman was right...some days you just can't get rid of a bomb.

Honorable Mention (superheroes):

Guardians of the Galaxy #6 – Neil Gaiman, Brian Michael Bendis, and Sara Pichelli intro-



ducing Angela to the hottest sci-fi heroes in the galaxy? As if *Guardians of the Galaxy* wasn't already one of the hottest commodities out there with the film gaining steam. This is akin to printing mon-

ey, it wouldn't be more bankable if they were handing out cash with Gaiman's face on the currency.

ROCKETEER / SPIRIT: PULP FRICTION #1

If you read the Rocketeer Retrospective from this issue, you already know that I have always been a fan of Dave Stevens' timeless character, the Rocketeer. And the

folks at IDW have treated this revered property with the care and respect it deserves from the start. Now team up the Rocketeer with Will Eisner's transcendent fighting hero, the Spirit, and you have something that is literally too good to be true. Mark Waid and Paul Smith are a fantastic team that gets just how special this book can be. If there was anyone I'd feel comfortable giving this project to, it's Waid. He loves comics enough to really do this series justice. And from everything I've seen so far, *Rocketeer / Spirit* has the potential to be one of those books that cleans up at the Eisners and Harveys. All that and Bettie too...

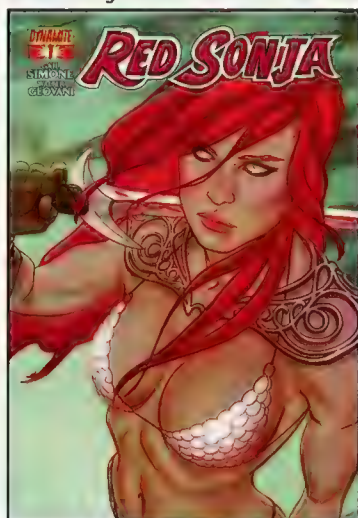


Love It: Two iconic characters from legends in the industry that have passed. I want so very earnestly for this to be a fitting tribute to these two giants that moved so many fans with their work, including me.

Hate It: The creators have very big shoes to fill...and falling short would be tragic on many levels.

Honorable Mention (licensed comics):

Red Sonja #1 – Gail Simone is the perfect choice to lead the adventures of one of comics' most recognizable female heroines. With covers by the best female creators in the business, the "She Devil with a Sword" has a chance to introduce



a legion of new fans to the fiery haired barbarian.

SATELLITE SAM #1

Rayguns, atomic space ships, and murder...Matt Fraction and Howard Chaykin tell the story of the death of Satellite Sam



during the golden age of television. With a tag line of this story being “comic noir” and boasting Chaykin’s distinctive artwork, this series has all the trademarks of a special project. Wholly original, beautifully illustrated, and painted as a murder mystery shot through with sex and violence...I’m tuning in that week for the next episode of Satelliiiiiiiite Sammmmm!

Love It: Call it the Chaykin Factor if you will – but I always look forward to the work this giant of the industry puts together. Ever since the first page of *American Flag*, I’ve been hooked on his vision and I’m sure this will be another exciting romp through his imagination.

Hate It: If this is as extreme as *Black Kiss 2* it will certainly alienate a portion of potential readers and retailers.

Honorable Mention (originality): *Saga #13* – How much do I have to say about *Saga*? Pretty much everyone who has read it, enjoys how fresh and original it is. With the third chapter beginning with Hazel and her parents looking for a cult romance novelist, you can certainly expect the unexpected to launch this story into orbit.



Those are the books I’m adding to my pull list. Here are a few others worthy of consideration:

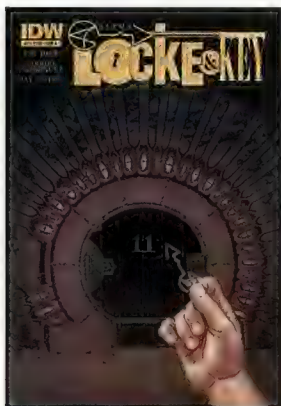
3 Guns #1 – Steven Grant won me over with *2 Guns* – I expect this sequel to have more action, violence, and well... guns than ever.

Buck Rogers in the 25th Century #1 – It must be Howard Chaykin Month in comics, but I can’t wait to see his take on this classic pulp hero!

Justice League #22 – The beginning of The Trinity War. This has super summer crossover written all over it.



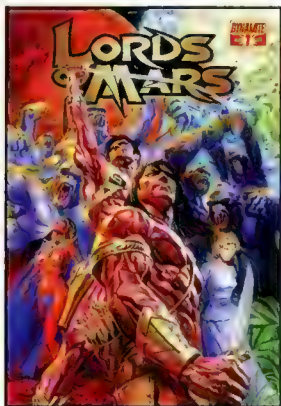
Lobster Johnson *A Scent of Lotus*



#1 – Mike Mignola is a master of the macabre and Lobster Johnson is the perfect mash up of pulp and horror.

Locke & Key:

Alpha #1 – The beginning of the end for Joe Hill's wonderfully frightful series. This is going to be a powerful finale from one of the real masters of horror.



Lords of Mars

#1 – Dynamite has shown us they know how to handle John Carter. Their series have become my go-to for the best in fantasy comics.



Quantum and

Woody #1 – Loved the old *Q&W* series and the folks at Valiant have sold me on their new vision for the characters. I can't wait to see what they do with this one.

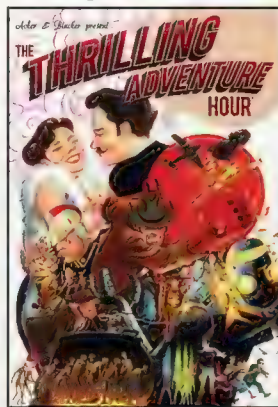


Robocop: Last

Stand #1 – Steven Grant adapting Frank Miller's original *Robocop* screenplay? Buy this book or there will be... trouble!



Skin Trade #1 – George RR Martin writing werewolves and illustrated by Mike Wolfer? It's a horror fan's dream wrapped up in a gory tattered skin bow.



The Thrilling

Adventure Hour HC – A collection of original genre talks inspired by old-time radio broadcasts? This sounds like a ton of fun!



T.H.U.N.D.E.R.

Agents #1 – I've never read *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* previously, but I know fans who swear by the book. I'm giving this series a try.

HOW TO MAKE MOVIES THE MARVEL WAY

by **Brendon Connelly**

Iron Man 3's Shane Black explains to me just what makes Marvel Studios movies so different. Is this the secret of their success?



If I somehow found the impossible formula for a smash-hit movie, something that could be replicated over and over to repeated success, it would kick-start the mother of all Hollywood bidding wars. Oh boy, it'd get vicious.

Imagine Universal at the throat of Warner Bros., Lionsgate clawing at the eyes of Paramount, and Sony swinging their cudgel for 20th Century Fox. I'm sure they'd all want "The Secret" for themselves. At least most of them...

Because I suspect that Marvel Studios might not be interested. In fact, the more success Marvel has at the box-office, the less interested they seem to be in formulas.

At the same time, however, I know that there's a system inside the studio for how the work gets done. This isn't just guys throwing darts. They may not have a specific, detailed recipe for their movies, but they do have a working process of their own and it has already developed a good reputation. So, I wanted to learn how to make movies the Marvel way.

When I spoke to *Iron Man 3's* co-writer and director, Shane Black, I knew I was sitting down with just the man to explain it to me. Here was an outsider who came in, went through the system, came out the other side with a film that people loved and that he himself seemed thrilled with. I started recording and began asking Black my questions about the system. Here is what he told me, including an explanation of how the Marvel Brain Trust of comic book creators make their contribution.



What I see is that, out of all the Marvel-logged movies that get made, at Disney or elsewhere, Kevin's little pocket seems to have been the most successful.

Marvel Studios is composed of a very elite-seeming, small group of people to whom you report and you deal with pretty much only them. That's kind of convenient, that's kind of good. You have Kevin Feige, Steven Broussard, Louis D'Esposito, and Victoria Alonso. Those are the four people whose voices are most often heard in creative meetings at Marvel. If you can devise something with them, if you can get it passed them, then it's gonna fly.

To their credit and to my relief, they said that "We don't want *Iron Man 3* to be *The Avengers* again. We want a standalone movie. *The Avengers* made a lot of money, but the template of just applying that to another movie and trying to recreate its success is not of interest to us."

They said "We want to do a standalone that's more Tony Stark-centric, that has him being maybe broken down or deprived of

all the riches and the tech that made him Tony Stark."

Given those parameters, that's pretty wide open. It was also permission to do a smaller story and to do something in keeping with the spirit of *Iron Man 1*. So I was onboard.

Drew Pearce came in and he said, basically, "I've been assigned to you." Kevin said "Drew did a draft of *Runaways* for us and we're not gonna make it but he owes us a draft of something so we're gonna roll him onto your project."

I said "Wait a minute. You usually work with directors and then you assign them writers. You don't work with writer directors?"

"Well, we haven't"

"I'm a writer as well as director. I don't need Drew. Just get rid of Drew. Forget about him, I don't want him."

And now it was starting to get uncomfortable. I said "I have a co-writer, is that what you're saying? I just have to have one?" and Kevin said "We'd like you to use



him for a draft."

I said "Okay, great. Look, he's tall, he's got a funny beard, he laughs a lot, he's a very loud guy. Can we just not...?"

But I met Drew and we sat down and I was prepared to not like him, but I loved him. Within a week we were tossing ideas back and forth like it was nothing and having a great time, and I'd write something else with him any day of the week now. It was one of these really fortuitous meetings where I went in thinking "I can't believe they've paired me with some bozo I've never heard of" and he ended up being one of the nicest and most talented people I've ever had the chance to work with.

At first, Drew and I went off together for four weeks and came up with the story. It's only then you go and present it to Marvel and they go "Okay, let's talk about it."

We get in an office and brainstorm and usually it takes two or three days to break the story. You sit with the people at Marvel and you just talk for hours about the story. It was like Drew and I would be having a

writers meeting but Marvel would just be sitting there. That's not bad, because it gets rid of the middle man - they're in on it. But I've never known another studio that was willing to spend that time, to sit there for six hours listening to writers come up with a story. And yeah, they'd thrown in an idea, every now and then.

I've never known anybody who'd collaborate at that intense a level. Most studios, they just say "Come up with it, give us the bullet points, we'll read the draft" but the Marvel guys insist on being present and a participant in every aspect of the planning.

The comic book guys, the Marvel Comics Brain Trust are in New York. We would wait until we had a draft and then we'd send it to New York. It would come back with notes, and we'd use some and we would, you know, not use others. But Kevin could be the arbiter of that. Kevin was very good at deciding which notes to use. He says "Don't panic, but here are the notes. These ones are good, these ones are very good, and these maybe don't apply." If we used every



single one of the hundreds of notes they sent, it'd be crazy, but Kevin manages things. He's very good at it.

Everyone has a say, but ultimately, I'd have to say, the most important part of the process is Kevin. Whenever we were solving a problem we knew we had it when we pitched our ideas to Kevin and he said "I think that's it, I think that's the answer."



Iron Man 3 is headed to DVD, Blu-ray, and Download soon. The next Marvel Studios movie will be *Thor: The Dark World* in October.

BORN ON THE BAYOU: SWAMP THING'S ROOTS

by Rich Handley

DC Comics' decision, in 2011, to cancel all existing series and launch 52 new titles—among them a reboot of cult classic *Swamp Thing*, from writer Scott Snyder and illustrator Yanick Paquette—was met with great skepticism. DC hoped to create a blank slate for writers, unfettered by decades of continuity, but many were disappointed to see the prior mythology jettisoned.

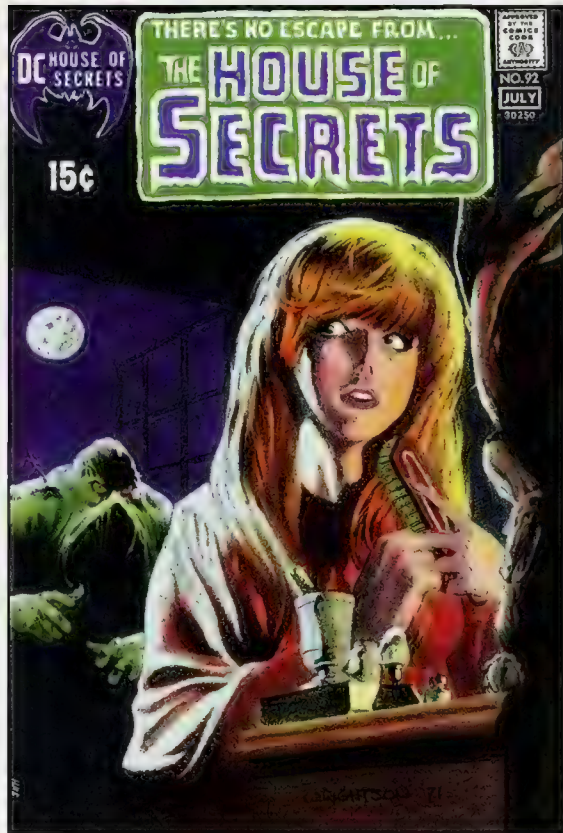
Fans and critics have largely embraced *Swamp Thing* Volume 5 and its re-alignment with the mainstream DC universe. But those who have read only the revamped *Swamp Thing* know only a small portion of the character's history. To help get new readers up to speed on what they've missed, here's a look back at the first four volumes.

FROM THE DEPTHS

In June 1971, Len Wein and Berni Wrightson introduced a shambling mossy monster to comic book readers, in *The House of Secrets* #92. The idea was not entirely original, of course. Bog-dwellers such as *Airboy's* Heap, for instance, had already stalked the swamps, as had DC's Solomon Grundy, Theodore Sturgeon's *It!* and Marvel Comics' *Man-Thing* (created by Wein's then-roommate, Gerry Conway). In fact, the early Seventies saw numerous muck-monsters enter the DC universe, in the pages of *The House of Mystery*, *The Phantom Stranger*, *Forbidden Tales of Dark Mansion*, *The Unexpected*, *World's Finest* and more.

Although Wrightson and Wein could not have known it at the time, their eight-page "Swamp Thing" tale would launch a saga spanning decades. Near the turn of the 20th century, scientist Alex Olsen was murdered by his friend Damian Ridge, reborn as a moss-covered monster, and shunned as hideous by his wife, Linda. It wasn't a new theme, nor was it the last time such a plot device would be used—see Sam Raimi's *Darkman*, for example—but Wrightson's vibrant, gothic illustrations, combined with Wein's creepy, touching text, created something unique.

"Gerry and I thought that, unconsciously, the origin in *Swamp Thing* #1 was a bit too similar to the origin of *Man-Thing* a year-and-a-half earlier," commented Roy Thomas, *Man-Thing's* co-creator, during a 2008 interview in *Alter Ego* #81. "We weren't happy with the situation over the *Swamp Thing* #1 origin, but we figured it was an accident. Gerry was rooming with Len at the time and tried to talk him into changing the *Swamp Thing's* origin. Len didn't see the similarities, so he went ahead with what he was going to do. The two characters verged off after that origin, so it didn't make much difference, anyway."





CREATOR DIFFERENCES

DC soon hired Wein and Wrightson to turn their creation into a monthly series, titled *Swamp Thing*. This version was set in the present day—the early 1970s—and told the story of Alec Holland, whose plight, backstory, and name were similar to Olsen’s. The reason for this similarity (revealed a decade later) would forever alter the course of *Swamp Thing* and, indeed, the entire comics industry. But that was later in the journey—there was Moore to come.

This time, rather than being murdered by a friend, Holland was killed by mobsters stealing a biorestorative formula he’d created. Initially, Alec ambled from one horrific escapade to the next, hunted and feared wherever he went—a supernatural version of *The Fugitive*—and encountering werewolves, witches, ghosts and grotesque denizens straight out of H.P. Lovecraft.

Wrightson left the title after ten issues, with Wein departing three issues later, to be replaced by artist Nestor Redondo and writer David Michelinie. Redondo stayed

aboard until the end of the run, with Ernie Chua and Fred Carrillo illustrating the final issue. During this period, *Swamp Thing* guest-starred with *Batman in The Brave and the Bold* #122, by Bob Haney and Jim Aparo.

The Wein and Michelinie eras introduced several key players, including Holland’s arch-nemesis, Anton Arcane; his best friend, Matthew Cable, later known to *Sandman* fans as Matt the Raven; and Arcane’s niece (and future wife to both Matt and Alec), Abigail Arcane. These early issues also featured several short-lived additions: the angry Jefferson Bolt, who traveled alongside Abby and Matt for some time, before inexplicably vanishing from the title; villains Mister E, John Zero, and Defense Department Intelligence (D.D.I.), Cable’s less-than ethical employer; and Alec’s estranged brother, Edward—all vital to that initial series, yet forgotten during later iterations.

Following Michelinie’s seven issues, Gerry Conway became the series’ third writer, penning two issues and plotting a third with David Anthony Kraft. Conway also wrote two solo tales about the Patchwork Man, a pitiable Wein-Wrightson creation drawn to resemble *Frankenstein’s Monster*, published in *The House of Secrets* #140 and issue #3/1983 of the Swedish comic *Gigant*. The Patchwork Man stories represent a failed attempt at a *Swamp Thing* spinoff built around Abby’s father, Gregori Arcane. The chapter printed in *Gigant*, originally slated for *The House of Secrets* #141, has only been released in Sweden.

Swamp Thing’s adventures were unexpectedly cut short in 1976, when the series was canceled after only 24 issues. In the ensuing years, Holland appeared in Conway’s *Challengers of the Unknown* #81-87, *DC Comics Presents* #8 by Steve Englehart and *The Brave and the Bold* #176 by Martin Pasko, while Matt guest-starred in *Showcase* #94-96, alongside the new *Doom*

Patrol. Throughout the Wein, Michelinie and Conway stints, Alec wallowed in freakish misery, desperate to restore his humanity. The final issues of *Swamp Thing* saw him accomplish that goal, thanks to help from his brother Edward, though *Challengers* reversed this success, transforming him once more into a “muck-encrusted mockery of a man.”



REPLANTED

Following the 1982 release of the first *Swamp Thing* film, starring Adrienne Barbeau, Louis Jordan, and Dick Durrock, the comic was revived as *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*. (The film was later followed by a sequel, *The Return of Swamp Thing*, as well as both live-action and animated TV shows, with Guillermo del Toro currently in talks to bring the character back to the big screen sometime in the future.) *Saga* proved far more successful than Volume 1, spanning 171 issues and seven annuals, plus guest appearances and crossovers with various DC/Vertigo titles.

The first 19 issues were written by Pasko, with artwork by Tom Yeates, Stephen Bissette, and John Totleben. As the fourth *Swamp Thing* scribe, Pasko had the daunting task of reviving the title after a six-year hiatus, which he did via a long-running serial involving former Nazis and the arrival of the Antichrist. Fan reception to his stories was mixed, but several essential players came out of that run, including journalist Lizabeth Tremayne; Dennis Barclay—who, in later tales, would undergo a creepy transformation from ally to enemy (Moore on that soon); and the vile General Sunderland, whose business empire would plague Alec and those he loved for decades.

More importantly, Pasko brought back three beloved characters from the Wein/Wrightson years, who would become the most significant people in Alec’s life: Matt Cable, Abby Arcane, and the evil Anton Arcane.

GROWTH SPURT

In 1984, beginning with issue #20, *Swamp Thing* ushered in a bold new age of comics: the so-called British Invasion. Alan Moore, who has since gained iconic status for *The Watchmen*, *From Hell*, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *V For Vendetta*, forever changed the way in which comics were written, when he took *Swamp Thing*’s reins and, in a single issue, un-did everything that had come before.

Readers had followed Holland’s attempt to restore his lost humanity for more than a decade. Rather than furthering those efforts, Moore revealed that not only would the monster never regain its humanity, but it had never had it to begin with. Alec had been dead since day one, Moore explained; the creature walking around with his memories was but a vegetable shade of the actual Dr. Holland, a plant that thought it was a man. Readers were stunned, and sales soared; in one fell swoop, *Swamp Thing* was revitalized.



"Len Wein told us when we started, with issue #16, the sales were near-cancellation, around 16,000 copies sold per month; he made it clear we might not be on the book long, and to give it our best shot," Bissette states. "Sans any advertising, save in-house ads and whatever DC mustered in their own monthly flyers to retailers, Len later told me and John that we'd managed to get the circulation up around 60,000 by 1985, and Karen [Berger] once said the same, so there you go—but that's all hearsay from me."

Moore penned a total of 45 tales featuring the character (including a notable Superman crossover for *DC Comics Presents* #85), before stepping down with issue #63. The Moore/Bissette/Totelben years remain the most celebrated of the series' history, restoring the gothic horror of Wein and Wrightson, while adding a poetic sense of narrative and a literate storytelling style that entranced fans and writers alike—indeed, Moore's style was soon copied across the board. It didn't hurt that the elimination of the Comics Code Authority's label from *Swamp Thing's* cover, as of issue

#29, removed several restrictions placed on the creative team. Among the team's accomplishments:

- A myriad of intriguing new abilities for the Swamp Thing, including changing size and shape, transporting himself instantly around the globe, growing multiple bodies, exploring space and even experiencing love on both a physical and emotional level.
- The debut of the Parliament of Trees, which explained how Wein's original *House of Secrets* eight-pager fit into the greater saga, and provided a jumping-off point for many future storylines.
- The introduction of Chester Williams, a Hippie with a heart of gold who became Swamp Thing's and Abby's dearest friend, supplying writers with a vehicle for addressing ecological concerns.
- The integration of Jason Woodrue, a cheeky DC Comics villain known as the Floronic Man, as a recurring character possessing surprising depth.
- Most significantly, the creation of magician John Constantine, who guided Swamp Thing's evolution into an elemental before receiving his own spinoff. *Hellblazer* has gone through several incarnations over the past quarter-century, written by Jamie Delano, Neil Gaiman, Garth Ennis, Eddie Campbell, Paul Jenkins, Darko Macan, Warren Ellis, Brian Azzarello, Mike Carey, Denise Mina, Andy Diggle, Peter Milligan, and (in a pair of novels) John Shirley. The series received a much-lambasted Keanu Reeves film adaptation, with a more accurate portrayal of Constantine rumored to appear in del Toro's upcoming film. *Hellblazer* was canceled as of issue #300, but was re-launched as *Constantine* for the New 52; the revamped mage also stars in *Justice League Dark*.

When Moore stepped down, some predicted the series would never recover, but his successor, writer-artist Rick Veitch, was no stranger to *Swamp Thing*, having illustrated Moore's run following the departure of Bissette and Totleben, as well as plotting issue #59 and penning issue #62. It was soon clear that any fears were unfounded, and that the series was in good hands.

Veitch assumed writing chores as of issue #64, remaining with the series until #87. Continuing Moore's poetic narrative, he developed a romantic relationship between Williams and Tremayne, and introduced fascinating characters of his own, such as Cajun healer Gene LaBostrie. Veitch moved the series away from gothic horror and into the realm of action and science fiction, sending Swamp Thing on an odyssey through time, to the dawn of creation. In so doing, he resurrected many classic DC characters, such as Jonah Hex, Tomahawk, and Merlin. During his run, Swamp Thing appeared in crossovers with several series, including *Captain Atom* #16-17, by Carey Bates, Delano's *Hellblazer* and Gaiman's *Black Orchid* miniseries.

Despite its critical acclaim, however, *Swamp Thing* remained a niche title. "Let's face it: We were an odd duck," Bissette recalls. "What many say set us apart also kept us apart in the marketplace. The loss of the Code was a badge of honor to Alan, John, Rick and me, but it knocked *Swamp Thing* off the newsstand at the very point we were picking up sales on the newsstand. I don't know, in the long wrong, if that arguably derailed the title for good, really."

Veitch's tenure is best known for two significant developments. The first was the creation of "the Sprout," an infant elemental created to replace Swamp Thing when the Parliament assumed him to be dead. This led to a sequence of issues in which Swamp Thing searched for a viable host for the Sprout, culminating in his soliciting Constantine's help in impregnating Abby to

create an infant host, which would become their daughter, Tefé.

The second involved Veitch's much-publicized resignation following DC's censorship of his script for issue #88, "Morning of the Magician." Worried that publishing a story in which Swamp Thing met Jesus Christ might anger Christians—similar backlashes had erupted over Solomon Rushdie's novel *Satanic Verses* and the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*—DC refused to run the script. In response, Veitch quit, taking Gaiman, Delano, and other popular creators with him.



DIVERGENT DIRECTIONS

Veitch's departure left DC frantic to complete the time-travel odyssey, and also created a bigger problem, as Gaiman and Delano had been slated to succeed him. Enter Doug Wheeler, who completed the arc but removed the Christ element entirely. Wheeler went on to write nearly 30 issues, during which he brought back

Arcane, introduced a Neanderthal elemental, and an Inuit Shaman protector for Tefé, and provided a wacky, amusing view of the DC universe's Hell.

Though Wheeler's work is often criticized, his early stories were actually quite intriguing, returning Swamp Thing to its gothic roots. In fact, Wheeler can claim credit for naming Tefé, and for revealing many of Alec Holland's elemental predecessors. But as time passed, the series quickly lost its steam, introducing a recurring enemy called Matango, a fallen elemental serving the Grey. Simply put, the Grey were evil mushrooms... from outer space.

This rather ridiculous concept turned away many readers. Sales dropped, and Swamp Thing's once praised-filled letters page became decidedly negative, with one fan suggesting that Wheeler may have been ingesting those same mushrooms while writing that storyline. Wheeler's disjointed six-part finale, "Quest for the Elementals," is widely cited as the weakest story arc in Swamp Thing's history—an irony, given that it sported some of the most beautiful covers to grace the title.

During Wheeler's tenure, Swamp Thing guest-starred in a four-part Firestorm story by John Ostrander that explored the character's elemental nature. In addition, DC released the Swamp Thing Sourcebook/Adventure for its DC Comics Roleplaying Game, expanding on the characters' backgrounds and featuring a short story by Ray Winninger, titled "Racing with the Rats." Both were better received than the "Quest" storyline, and by the time it was over, fans were eager to see the series taken in a new direction.

BREAKING THE BONDS OF LOVE

That new direction arrived in the form of horror novelist Nancy Collins, whose debut tale, in annual #6, explored the Cajun myth of a creature called Les Perdu. "I was



living in New Orleans at the time, so I had occasion to interact with genuine Cajuns—and their big-city cousins, the Yats—for the better part of a decade. Even before that, I grew up in Southeast Arkansas, known as the Ark-La-Miss, less than 20 miles from the Mississippi River. The area is famous for its bayous, swamps, and gators." Fans were won over, and the letters page resumed its former positivity.

"When I was approached by Stuart Moore (who was then an editor at DC) about 'auditioning' for *Swamp Thing* (I was one of several horror authors sought out by DC), it was made clear to me that their primary goal was to try and recover the audience they lost during Wheeler's tenure," Collins says. "Back then, any monthly book with sales below 30,000 was considered 'on the chopping block.' Now, of course, they'd be thrilled if they had a monthly book—Vertigo or DC Universe—that pulled down those numbers. But back then, the series was once more teetering on the verge of cancellation—and

the only thing that was keeping them from axing it altogether was that godawful animated series (and its associated toy line) that was on the air at the time."

Collins stayed aboard from issue #110 until #138, with occasional fill-ins from *Black Orchid* writer Dick Foreman. She also wrote the seventh annual (a tie-in to Vertigo's "Children's Crusade" miniseries) and an additional Swamp Thing tale, "The Ghost in the Green," for a promo comic called *Vertigo Jam—Louder Than Noise*. If a single theme could be said to describe her run, it would be "family." Alec's relationship with Abby took center stage, as did their trials and tribulations as parents to an infant elemental.

"DC made it clear that they wanted to get Swamp Thing back to his 'roots,' so to speak, and told me I could pretty much ignore the continuity from the previous run," Collins explains. "I decided that in order to do that, I needed to 'ground' Swampy in two things that are touchstones for us all: family and home. And in Swamp Thing's case, that meant the Cajuns of Terrebonne Parish and townsfolk of Houma, Louisiana. I decided to give the series the benefit of my first-hand knowledge of the area and its customs."

Even Collins' villains furthered this theme, as she brought back Abby's Uncle Anton, introduced General Sunderland's daughter, Connie, and explored John Constantine's ancestry. Whereas Moore and Veitch had Alec travel the globe, through time and to other worlds, Collins made a

concerted effort to keep him in the bayou that spawned him.

In addition, Collins added the character of Lady Jane, an elemental assigned to serve as Tefé's nanny. Jane was a staple cast member until the end of Collins' run, the series-shattering cliffhanger of which revealed her true mission: to end Swamp Thing's domestic lifestyle so he could resume his neglected duties as Earth's champion.

By seducing him, Lady Jane broke up his marriage to Abby and took Tefé to live with the Parliament, leaving him devastated and alone.

"I was told, at the start of my second year on Swamp Thing, that DC wanted the story arc to end with Swampy 'on his own again,' as they put it, and didn't care how I got him there," Collins recalls. "They even told me they were 'okay' with me killing Abby (again), as

well as the baby. That truly horrified me. I'd spent a lot of time making Tefé a fairly realistic toddler, with her own unique abilities and personality. The idea of killing her simply 'for sales' was genuinely offensive to me. I had just undergone a divorce from my first husband, and you can see some of that reflected in Abby's response to the situations Swampy puts her and the family in. And, let's be frank—no woman in her right mind would put up with the bullshit Abby Holland was subjected to on a regular basis." Alan Moore, in fact, commended her on giving Abby the guts to walk out of "an unworkable relationship," she says. "So I decided to end the story arc with the death



of Swamp Thing's 'marriage' and parental rights, as opposed to the murder of his wife and child."

This decision, she admits, did not go over well with some readers. "Fans are used to characters being killed and brought back from the dead on a regular basis, to the point where it has lost all meaning," she states. "Characters getting divorced, on the other hand—there's no coming back from that, apparently. I guess it's because fans have never truly experienced death first-hand, but a good number of them have endured a divorce, and they know that shit's final. I got hate mail for months! And, in the end, my efforts to 'rescue' mother and child were for naught, as the New Earth versions have been changed beyond recognition."



NOTHING IS SACRED

At the end of Collins' run, Vertigo published a five-part story by Dave Louapre, titled "American Freak: A Tale of the Un-Men." This Frankenstein-esque miniseries (later continued in *The Un-Men*, a short-lived monthly by John Whalen and

Mike Hawthorne) told the tale of a teenager who learned he was spawned by creatures created in Arcane's horrific laboratory. An unusual story with a dark theme, *American Freak* ushered in the macabre tone of Swamp Thing's next writer, Mark Millar.

Saying Millar put a new spin on Swamp Thing would be akin to observing that the Hulk may have some anger issues. More accurately, he blew the Swamp Thing universe wide open, up-ending everything that had come before. With Swamp Thing's domesticated lifestyle out of the way, Millar was free to change things as he saw fit.

Millar's four-part opening arc, co-written by Grant Morrison, began with a human Alec Holland awakening in bed, confused over an amazingly realistic dream of being a plant creature with a wife named Abby and a daughter named Tefé. With the words "And then he woke up," Millar employed an unexpected twist on *Dallas*' "Bobby Ewing in the shower" trick that had huge ramifications for the Swamp Thing saga—in effect, it rendered obsolete everything Alec had ever experienced in his nearly two hundred issues as the Bog God up to that point.

Gone were Alec's ongoing battle with Anton Arcane, the *D.D.I.*, and the Sunderlands; his ties to family and friends; his history with the Cajuns; his connections to Black Orchid, Woodrue and other plant-kingdom denizens; even the very existence of the Parliament of Trees. What's more, much like *Dallas* spinoff *Knots Landing* after the Bobby Ewing fiasco, the future of *Hellblazer* seemed in peril, for if *Swamp Thing* hadn't happened, then how could its spinoff exist?

Fan reaction was mixed; though a fascinating concept, it made little sense when viewed logically. Swamp Thing's connection to DC Comics' established continuity was too intertwined to extract it without affecting decades of characters and storylines. Thus, it wasn't surprising when Millar restored the

mythos to its former status, revealing that Alec's dream scenario had been merely an illusion perpetrated by a trio of mysterious magicians in fulfillment of a millennia-old prophecy.

Building off Collins' Lady Jane epic, Veitch's Tefé storyline and Wheeler's examination of ancient elemental history, Millar took it all one step further. He transformed the Parliament of Trees from a source of spiritual guidance to a deadly adversary; revealed the existence of parliaments for other elements (the Parliaments of Stones, Waves, Vapors and Flames); and severed Alec Holland's humanity from the Swamp Thing entirely, making him a grave threat to mankind's existence.

Millar's tenure was marked by a more sexual and violent tone, in keeping with the launch of DC's Vertigo imprint for adult readers, which included not only *Swamp Thing* and *Hellblazer*, but also *Sandman*, *Animal Man*, *Preacher*, *Shade the Changing Man*, and other titles. While the switch to Vertigo reduced interactions between Swamp Thing and DC's costumed crowd, it allowed writers to delve more deeply into the darker recesses of characters' psyches, and to tell more penetrating tales of horror. Many welcomed the change, as Swamp Thing never fit comfortably into the superhero niche anyway.

Millar's disturbing run resurrected Linda Holland as a hooker for sadistic Johns, and also featured the beheading of Jason Woodrue, as well as an attempt by Alec and Tefé to wipe out the human species. His unsavory characters dwelled in a grey area of morality, not easily cast into typical molds of "good" or "evil." Alec's guest appearances in other titles at the time (*The Demon* #51, *Batman* #521-522 and *Underworld Unleashed: Abyss*) followed this trend.

Millar's run, in effect, was a throwback to Moore and Veitch, with Alec undertaking an odyssey of self-discovery during a

series of trials, at the end of which he was rewarded with dominion over other Earth parliaments. As the second series neared its final issue, in fact (#171, published in 1996), it seemed the increasingly powerful Swamp Thing would supplant God. But in the series' final hours, Alec discovered his true mission—to unite Earth and usher it into the Parliament of Worlds. Humbled, he set aside his desire to kill humanity and instead helped mankind achieve its next level of evolution (a development largely ignored by future *Swamp Thing* writers).

And with that, *Swamp Thing's* second run came to a satisfying conclusion. But in comics, as Collins noted, death is rarely forever.



THE LEAN YEARS

Over the next four years, Swamp Thing guest-starred in a number of other comics, most notably *Aquaman* #32-33, *The Spectre* #62, *Starman* #48 and *Martian Manhunter* #11. In addition, *The Dreaming* (starring Matt Cable in his post-Sandman days as the Raven) included two storylines

of vital importance to Swamp Thing history: issues #22-24, in which Matt regained human form to reunite with Abby, and #42-43, in which Matt died a final death. Also released were John J. Muth's painted one-shot, *Swamp Thing: Roots*; Tom Peyer's *Totems*, illustrated by Duncan Fegredo, Richard Case and Dean Ormston; and "Jack-in-the-Green," a short tale written by Neil Gaiman and illustrated by Bisette and Totelben, published in Neil Gaiman's *Midnight Days*.

Swamp Thing: Roots offered a touching portrait of a former Earth elemental, set during the events of the Second World War, and exploring the themes of redemption and sacrifice. *The Midnight Days* tale, meanwhile, revealed a fascinating chapter in the history of the elemental Jack-in-the-Green that had long remained unpublished.

Totems, however, was another matter. Part of Vertigo's V2K millennium event, the one-shot was widely condemned, with a gimmicky premise, a meandering plot, and illogical characterizations that violated established continuity.

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

Despite *Totem's* failure, 2000 was a banner year nonetheless for *Swamp Thing*, as it saw the launch of Volume 3. This run focused not on Alec and Abby, but on Tefé. Vertigo asked several authors, including Darko Macan, to submit outlines, with Brian K. Vaughn (later of *Y: The Last Man* and *Lost* fame) earning the assignment. Vaughn's series was penciled by Roger Peterson and by Giuseppe Camuncoli, with inks by a host of artists.

Having tried to help her father destroy humanity in Millar's run, Tefé was considered too dangerous to remain free. Thus, with John Constantine's help, Alec and Abby trapped her spirit in the body of a dying teenager named Mary Conway. The hope was to erase her memory of her true identity and keep her from causing further trouble.



Unfortunately, things in the bayou rarely go as planned, particularly when Constantine is involved.

Awakening from her amnesia, Tefé embarked on a path of self-discovery to determine her place in the world as a plant-human hybrid created to serve a defunct Parliament. During her travels, she befriended loner Barnabas Tookome, an Inuit who loved her despite fearing what she stood for, and game hunter Pilate, who joined her out of loyalty, but was ready to assassinate her if necessary. Tefé was hunted not only by her parents and Constantine, but also by Agent Romero, a sadistic assassin for the revitalized D.D.I.

Vaughn's run met mixed reviews. Admirers extolled the characterization of angst-ridden Tefé, and the additions of Barnabas and Pilate to the *Swamp Thing* pantheon, while criticism centered on the stories being non-epic in nature; and on Alec and Abby not being the central focus. Vaughn's portrayals of Alec, Abby, and Constantine were spot-on, his stories entertaining, but after only 20 monthly issues, as well as a short tale in *Winter's Edge III* and

a *Secret Files and Origins* special, Volume 3 came to a premature close in 2001, a victim of low sales once again.



NEW SEEDS TAKE ROOT

Volume 4, however, was not far around the corner. In early 2004, writer Andy Diggle and artist Enrique Breccia picked up where Vaughn left off. With Alec's soul separated from his elemental half (in Mike Carey's *Hellblazer* #184-193), he was once more reduced to a wandering, shambling muck-monster. Without Abby or Tefé, depression set in, leaving Alec vulnerable when Sargon the Sorcerer set out to steal his and Tefé's powers. Diggle's storyline, though engaging, contained inconsistencies and was seen as derivative of Millar's run.

Next, Will Pfeifer turned in a two-parter for issues #7-8, illustrated by *Hellblazer* artist Richard Corben, after which Breccia returned alongside *Swamp Thing*'s 11th scribe, Joshua Dysart. Reaction to Dysart's run was positive, as he knew his swampy history. Beginning with an *Arcane* storyline built off Millar's redemption for that character,

Dysart introduced a new boyfriend for Abby, returned the Hollands to Houma for an attempt at a normal life, made Tefé a lesbian, and teased the coming hellspawn of Anton Arcane.

Dysart's run revisited the romance of Alec and Linda Holland, introducing Alec's former mentor (and Linda's ex-lover), Jordan Schiller, now custodian to a discarded piece of Alec's elemental spirit. Dysart also penned a tale about a storyteller's creations coming to life and terrorizing Louisiana, and resurrected an insane Jason Woodrue. But after only 29 issues, Volume 4 suffered the same fate as Vaughn's run, coming to an abrupt end in 2006.

Dysart was given inadequate notice to wrap up his storyline, leaving *Arcane*'s hellspawn unseen, his plans unrealized. "There was a lot of great stuff coming," Dysart told swampthingroots.com in 2007. "The thing is, to my mind, we'd only gotten the first storyline finished. After that, each of the 'Southern Stories' was going to have their own story and interaction with *Swamp Thing* explored... and Paul Pope had agreed to pencil the two-issue "Ill-Fated Cajun Lovers" story, which was to be about zombies in turn-of-the-century Louisiana, when the Cousins Marriage Law was enacted (and yes, there would have been a turn-of-the-century *Swamp Thing* involved)."

Eventually, Dysart intended to turn *Swamp Thing* into a perceived terrorist, in a storyline culminating in the birth of *Arcane*'s hellish love-child. "The child was going to be an atrocious insectilian monster, but have the soul of the Buddha—a completely evolved messianic being, far beyond his years in wisdom," Dysart said. "Imagine the stories of Monster Buddha in Hell. He would start to be persecuted, of course, and *Swamp Thing* was going to return to Hell to rescue him, then bring him back to the surface, where the child's greater wisdom would bring about a peaceful resolution to the war in the swamp. After that, who knows."



BACK TO THE BAYOU

Swamp Thing was once more in limbo, where it remained until the character's return in *Brightest Day* in 2010, followed a year later by *Brightest Day Aftermath: The Search for the Swamp Thing*. These two miniseries ushered in DC's New 52, leading to Swamp Thing's current iteration.

Although paying homage to Swamp Thing's past, Volume 5 (in keeping with the New 52 conceit) ignores the title's established history, particularly with regard to the Arcane lineage, the timeline of events, the Parliament of Trees' motivations, and so forth. Still, the series has found a strong footing, and looks likely to out-last both the third and fourth runs.

Scott Snyder and Yanick Paquette produced 18 monthly issues, along with a 2012 annual and a special "zero issue," for an even 20 chapters. The duo recently ended their tenure after concluding the "Rotworld" storyline, with writer Charles Soule and artist Jose Angel Cano Lopez ("Kano") inheriting the reins as of issue #19. Whatever direction the New 52 may take, as Soule and Kano

implant themselves in Swamp Thing lore, readers can always revisit the title's roots. With 35 years' worth of pre-New 52 stories spread out over four series, *Swamp Thing's* base structure remains strong and vibrant, thanks to the sturdy seed planted in 1971 by Berni Wrightson and Len Wein.

"Len and Berni really poured something of themselves, and of their love for the genre in all its emotional diversity, into that little gem of a story—and then expanded upon it magnificently, for its time, in the ten issues they did together," Bissette says. "So, solid bedrock, I'd argue, and ripe soil. The rest is in the tilling and planting and tender-loving care, and whether the respective creative teams have green thumbs! Swamp Thing has survived some really, really dire incarnations and lows, but he keeps sprouting new bodies, and enough of 'em have heart and soul to spare."



Thanks to Stephen Bissette, Nancy Collins, and Joshua Dysart.

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THE "SUMMER OF VALIANT" RETURNS

by Rich Handley



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In 1989, Marvel Comics' Bob Layton and Jim Shooter unveiled a new comic book line, Valiant Comics, under parent company Voyager Communications. The company achieved fast success and, in 1994, was purchased by Acclaim Entertainment—but when Acclaim closed shop a decade later, the Valiant Universe was put on hold, until the firm reformed as Valiant Entertainment in 2005.

Last summer, Valiant relaunched its comic line with a marketing initiative dubbed the "Summer of Valiant." That lineup began with *X-O Manowar* #1, by Robert Venditti and Cary Nord, and was followed by *Harbinger* #1, by Joshua Dysart and Khari Evans; *Bloodshot* #1, by Duane Swierczynski, Manuel Garcia and Arturo Lozzi; and *Archer & Armstrong* #1, by Fred Van Lente and Clayton Henry. The publisher reported strong sales numbers for each title, and soon launched a fifth new series, *Shadowman*, by Justin Jordan and Patrick Zircher.

To celebrate the first anniversary of that rebirth, the company recently unveiled

its "Summer of Valiant" lineup for 2013. "With the success of our return to comics, the idea just seems to have clicked with the collective consciousness of fandom," says Dinesh Shamdasani, Valiant's Chief Creative Officer. "It's something that we're known for, but more importantly, it gives us a chance to point toward the big, definitive entry points into the Valiant Universe for new readers." The publisher's priorities are accessibility and quality storytelling, he explains, adding,

"Whether this is your first Valiant book or your 50th, the 'Summer of Valiant' is about celebrating that with exciting new stories."

This year's "Summer of Valiant" titles include *Quantum and Woody* #1, the first issue of a new ongoing series by James Asmus and Tom Fowler; *X-O Manowar* #15, by Venditti and Lee Garbett, showcasing a story arc titled

"The Road to Unity"; *Bloodshot* #0, by Matt Kindt and ChrisCross, revealing the title character's origins; *Bloodshot* and *H.A.R.D. Corps* #14, by Dysart, Christos Gage and Emanuela Lupacchino, offering a new storyline set in the aftermath of the *Harbinger Wars* miniseries; and *Eternal Warrior* #1, a new ongoing series from Greg Pak and Trevor Hairsine.





QUANTUM AND WOODY #1

Launched by Christopher Priest and Mark D. Bright for Acclaim Entertainment in 1997, *Quantum and Woody* soon spawned a loyal following. The series told the story of Eric and Woody Henderson, a pair of adopted brothers and best friends as children who ended up estranged siblings and petty rivals as adults. When their father's murder reunited the brothers, they found themselves with a new purpose in life—costumed crime-fighting—after an industrial accident turned their bodies into pure energy, requiring them to slam metal gauntlets together every 24 hours or else break apart and fade away.

The title characters guest-starred in numerous other titles during Valiant's early days, and the entire original series was recently republished digitally via comiXology. Now, Valiant is bringing the superhero duo back, in what the company describes as an "action-packed, zeitgeist-shredding

exploitation stunt comic." Issue #1 will feature the "accidental origin and ill-advised rise of the world's worst superhero team."



X-O MANOWAR #15

"X-O Manowar was the title we launched with a year ago," says Fred Pierce, Valiant's Publisher, "and it continues to be our flagship title. It will always be at the very heart of what we're doing in the Valiant Universe. But, more importantly, at a story level, what Robert Venditti and Lee Garbett are delivering in #15-18 will be of extreme import to the next year of the Valiant Universe. Some of you may have heard us teasing something called 'Unity' for the winter, and this arc of *X-O Manowar* is very much the 'Road to Unity.'"

Following the events of the "Planet Death" arc, Pierce says, Aric of Dacia has returned to Earth carrying something of great personal value. "In order to protect it," he states, "he's invaded and occupied his ancestral homelands in Romania, renaming

his new kingdom 'Dacia,' after the legendary Visigoth nation-state. Naturally, however, this is an action that's drawn the attention of the world's militaries—and, with them, the Eternal Warrior." With Europe on high alert and *X-O Manowar* labeled a worldwide threat, he adds, the question will become whether the Warrior can show Aric that the rules of the Visigoth age no longer apply. "And no matter the outcome, as the threads behind Unity start to come together, we're going to find out that the world as we know it is being fundamentally changed by the continued presence of the *X-O Manowar* armor on Earth."



BLOODSHOT #0

In *Bloodshot* #0, the company promises to reveal the "definitive origin of *Bloodshot* once and for all." The time was right to pull back the curtain on the character's secrets, says Warren Simons, Valiant's Executive Director. "*Bloodshot's* taken 1,000 bullets

over the past year, all in a desperate attempt to stay alive as he learns more about his past and hunts for his true identity," he explains.

"In many ways, this story culminates in issue #0, and will help set the tone of the series for the next year," Simons adds. "Matt really digs in on the origin and spells it out pretty explicitly, and while that can be a dangerous and compelling thing to do with this character—especially this early on in the run—I think the time is right." Kindt, he says, turned in "a great story we all think the world of."

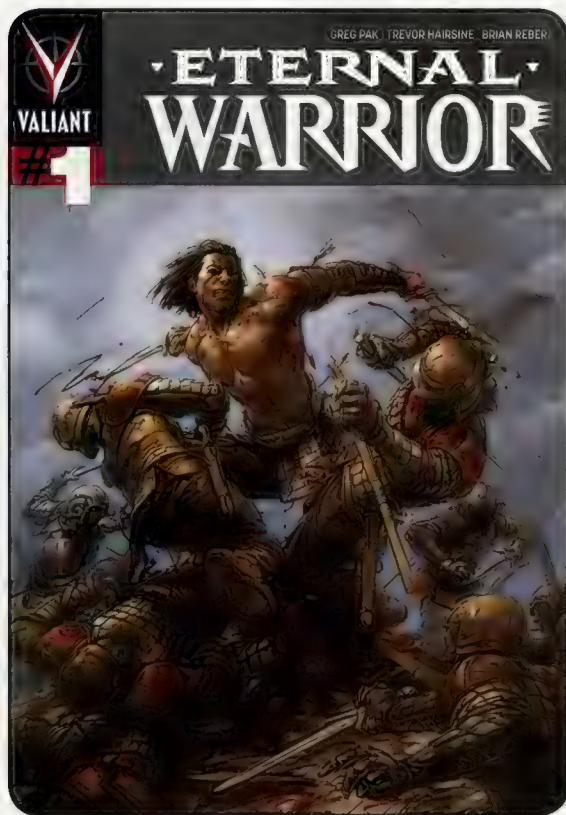


BLOODSHOT AND H.A.R.D. CORPS #14

Bloodshot and H.A.R.D. Corps will see Bloodshot leading a team ostensibly controlled by his enemies, as part of an experimental procedure known as Project Rising Spirit. According to Hunter Gorinson, Valiant's Marketing and Communications Manager, *Bloodshot's* status quo will be "massively altered" in this storyline. "For

the past year," he explains, "he's essentially been on a one-man solo mission, and the story of *Bloodshot and H.A.R.D. Corps* will build directly on everything we've come to learn about him thus far."

In issue #14, Gorinson reports, Bloodshot is not a member of the H.A.R.D. Corps team, and still ranks among its primary targets. "How Bloodshot falls in line alongside this over-the-top and risk-taking group of technologically modified soldiers is all part of the fun that Gage, Dysart, and Lupacchino are having in building the series," he says. The creative team plans to explore many key questions of the Bloodshot mythos, including the nature of Project Rising Spirit. "And trust me when I say that those answers are going to present a few more messy questions rather quickly."



ETERNAL WARRIOR #1

Finally, following appearances in *Archer & Armstrong* and, soon, *X-O Manowar*, the Eternal Warrior will be Valiant's first character to spin off into a new ongoing series.

"The first issue of *Eternal Warrior* # 1 is a blood-soaked, action-packed epic that brings Gilad Anni-Padda (a.k.a. the Eternal Warrior) into the Valiant Universe in full force," Simons reports. The series will reveal a new, never-before-seen corner of the Valiant mythos that will help explain what it means to be the Fist and the Steel, a protector of the Geomancer—a warrior, a soldier and, perhaps, the most dangerous being alive. "Our goal, as with all Valiant titles, is to make the series accessible and provide a clean entry-point to new readers, but to also seamlessly fit into the continuity of his previous appearances."

WHAT IS UNITY?

"Summer of Valiant" 2013 will kick off on July 10 with *Quantum and Woody* #1 and *X-O Manowar* #15, followed by *Bloodshot* #0 in August, and *Bloodshot and H.A.R.D. Corps* #14 and *Eternal Warrior* #1 in September. The publisher has been hinting at what lies in store for the Valiant Universe beyond its summer lineup, including an upcoming project—the details of which are still "hush-hush, top-secret, and classified," but according to Shamdasani it is involving something known as "Unity."

"Unity is something that we're trying to stay tight-lipped about," Shamdasani teases, "but let me say this: Unity is not an 'event,' in the typical sense." It will not be a retread or reboot of the same-named storyline from Valiant's original lineup, he notes, which involved a company-wide crossover event published in summer 1992. Rather, he says, "Our Unity is something that has never before been attempted by Valiant, and a whole new take on what the word means." The Unity arc, Shamdasani promises, will be "the single best, most accessible jumping-on point for new readers that we've produced since *X-O Manowar* #1, more than a year ago."

COMING NEXT SUMMER...?

In addition, the powers at Valiant gave *Bleeding Cool Magazine* a glimpse at several potential properties that could make up a future "Summer of Valiant" initiative, which he describes as follows:

Ninjak: A natural choice for a new on-going series, Valiant's famous '90s ninja/international man of mystery made his first (re)appearance last September in *X-O Manowar* #5 and seemed poised for big things. But since snagging the spotlight in the 'Enter: Ninjak' story arc—and despite a teaser appearance in Valiant's 2013 Free Comic Book Day issue—little has been heard about this purple-and-gold powerhouse since. Could he be lined up for a new #1 debut in 2014? Let's hope so.



Timewalker: A staple of the original Valiant Universe, Ivar, the time-traveling brother of Armstrong and the Eternal Warrior, has made a few on-panel appearances in recent issues of *Archer & Armstrong*. Could this be a harbinger of big things to come?

Generation Zero: The escaped teenage test subjects of Project Rising Spirit have been making a splash in the pages of *Harbinger Wars*, where they rank alongside Bloodshot and the Harbinger

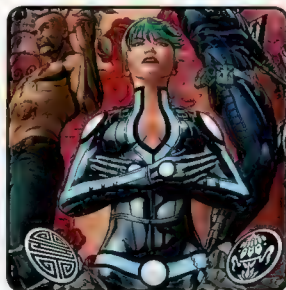


Renegades as stars of Valiant's first crossover event. With *Harbinger Wars* headed for an explosive finale this month, could Generation Zero—an entirely new team of characters co-created by Harbinger's Joshua Dysart—be ready to spin out into a new series? That would be a big first for the new Valiant.

Harada: As the primary villain of the *Harbinger* series and, indeed, the entire Valiant Universe at large, Toyo Harada has been a scene-stealer, even going so far as to snag an issue entirely devoted to his origin in *Harbinger* #0. Villain books are always a tough nut to crack, but Harada has enough shades of grey that a solo series might just make for a compelling read.



Doctor Mirage: Another recently rebooted character from the original Valiant Universe, the good doctor recently popped up in the pages of *Shadowman* with a modus operandi... and a new gender. With solid name recognition (and fond memories of the original series by Bob Layton and Bernard Chang), Doctor Mirage would be a wise choice to flesh out the Valiant U's supernatural side as Valiant's first female headlining superhero.



Rai: Since day one of Valiant's resurrection, fans have been clamoring about word on Rai—the super-powered samurai protector of 41st-century Japan that anchored the 'future-verse' of the original Valiant line. Although we haven't yet seen what the future of the new Valiant U looks like, Rai did make a brief appearance in Valiant's 2012 Free Comic Book Day issue. Come 2014, could we be due for a new solo series starring the lynchpin of the original Valiant Universe?

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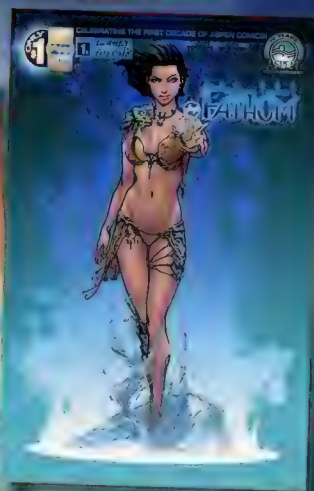
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DARK HORSE HORROR: A DECADE OF FRIGHT

A conversation with Dark Horse EIC Scott Allie
by Dan Wickline

Outside of the guys in tights, the horror genre produces the best selling comic on store shelves. Fans love the dark and creepy, and one of the names synonymous with fright is Dark Horse Comics. In 2003 I interviewed then Editor Scott Allie about many things including what seemed to be the start of their Horror Line. I recently had the opportunity to chat with now Editor-in-Chief Scott about the last ten years, how the horror line came about in the first place, and how he sees it progressing.

Scott: "When we started this, there was a critical mass of comics of a certain type happening at Dark Horse, and there always had been. I felt that we'd long been doing the best horror comics on the market, even if you only count *Hellboy*, but we weren't recognized as a horror publisher, because it wasn't all we did. That's the thing in comics, everyone expects you to only do one thing, because the big two only do one thing, to the absurd extent that they think they can trademark a genre. We've always done a lot of different things, because we—mainly Mike Richardson—thinks that readers read different kinds of things. One doesn't only read horror, or only read science fiction—just like no one only goes to see superhero movies. But because of how the industry works, they may well only read superhero comics. We'd always done great horror comics, and the horror line push in 2003 was an effort to get us recognized as the premier publisher of horror comics. It just so happened Steve Niles had just brought *Criminal Macabre* to us, and we'd acquired Eric Powell's *The Goon*—both of which are part of this fall's horror push. So with *Hellboy* as the backbone of the line, we've managed to keep it going, although this year and last have been the most fruitful."





Horror as a genre has remained popular for years, but within the genre there tends to be a cycle that allows certain stories to climb in demand then wane again. We've seen times where every book on the shelf is about vampires, suddenly it changes to serial killer stories, and then changes again to zombies leaving some companies scrambling to keep up. I asked Scott if Dark Horse tried to ride those cycles and what he thought was going to be the next 'thing.'

Scott: "I don't really think about that that much. Trends are cyclical, horror is forever. I am terrible at reading trends, in part I think because I'm generally not swayed by them. I can't predict trends, and if you try to jump on it after they've happened, you probably miss them, and put out a derivative, insincere product whose time has passed. Two of the hottest horror comics right now from other publishers, *Fatale* and *Revival*... *Fatale* certainly has nothing to do with any trends in horror, it's just really well done. If *Revival* is an effort to cash in on the zombie craze (which I think is over for all intents and purposes), they're certainly going about it in a very subtle manner. You've got to be your own zeitgeist. But, when in doubt, Poe."

Since the time of the horror line's inception, Dark Horse has had access to some of the top horror writers in the industry: from Mike Mignola, Steve Niles, and Eric Powell to stars outside of the industry like Joss Whedon and Corey Taylor. I asked Scott about the process of finding new talent. Was it a matter of being wowed by a potential project or was it the creator who caught his eye and then finding the right vehicle for them.

Scott: "It's the singer, not the song. And then it's the song. You just go after the guys that excite you and you let them do their thing. In my arrogance, I think what I know how to do is get a writer or artist to do the best version of his thing. Richard Corben wants to do Poe for the next few years, great. When I asked Mike Richardson if he was interested in that, he just wanted Corben doing something he was excited about. There's perhaps more commercial things for Corb to do than Poe, but he's gonna do his best work if he's really heated up about it, and that's the work that's gonna last, ten years from now, twenty.

I really wanted Tim Seeley to bring me something for him to write (or co-write) and draw, and when he pitched *Ex Sanguine*, I knew that was right on the money for him. The new golem series by Steve Niles, *Breath of Bones*—Steve had a story really worth telling. With that one, I admittedly was tempted to interfere—I didn't get it at first, I didn't realize the strength of what he was doing, but as the whole thing shaped up, I realized it was some of the best work of his career. Best thing I did was not get in the way."

This summer/fall, the horror line gets even stronger with a slew of books to send chills up your spine, starting with the second volume in the novel – turned comic – soon to be television series *The Strain* by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan. The second series kicks off with Dr. Ephraim Goodweather, Director of the Center for Disease Control, being one of the few humans who truly comprehend the ramifications of the epidemic and the

increasing number of vampires in New York City. But the good doctor has more than just humanity to protect as his ex-wife Kelly is now a vampire and has a craving for their son, Zack. I asked series editor Sierra Hahn what she felt set the series apart from other vampire comics and what to expect in the second volume.

Sierra: "The greatest strength of *The Strain*, the first book in the trilogy, is that it treats vampires in a new way—as grotesque, vile, diseased monsters. They are meant to be feared, not romanticized. That was an original approach for the last few decades. As we delve into the second chapter, *The Fall*, we realize that where there was hope in *The Strain*, there is none in *The Fall*. Darkness lies ahead for our heroes as the vampire epidemic, a seeming parasitic blood disease, consumes mankind."



From there we jump to the world of Cal McDonald, a constant in the line since its inception. With *Criminal Macabre: The Eyes of Frankenstein*, the occult detective has ghouls dying all around him while he tries to deal with his own illness. And there is a blind Frankenstein's Monster in search of a new pair of eyes to help. With *Criminal Macabre* being one of the tent poles of the Dark Horse Horror line, I asked Steve Niles how Cal has changed over the years.

Steve: "Cal has come a long way in the last decade. Back then he was just a wasted detective trying to find his next score. Now he is part of the monster world he once only fought. Cal has finally come to terms with the war between darkness and light and is now starting to realize he may be the one leading the earth's defense. I'm very lucky to have Dark Horse allow me the freedom to explore the character and see just how far I can push it."



From there we take a look at a very unique series called *Grindhouse* where the eight issues make up four different B-movie style stories. The first two-issue set focuses on a small southern town where alien bees have tainted the local honey making all of the women want to plant seeds into the men. I asked series writer Alex de Campi what excited her about the new series.

Alex: "*Grindhouse* for me was a chance to really let loose with everything my sick, perverse mind could think up. All the gore, all the sexy, all the over-the-top badassery that you can cram into 24 pages... And then a little extra for good measure. From katana-wielding sadistic women's prison wardens to moped-riding, field hockey-playing girl gangs with a penchant for erotic pie fights, we've got it. And some truly horrific nasties that will make you cross your legs and wince in the best Italian gross-out horror SFX tradition. Every artist is having so much fun with the project and really doing their best work. We're all going to Hell for this book, but hey—at least we're having fun."



As a final question I asked Scott what he felt was the major contributing factor to the success of the line and what he thought made their horror titles stand out from the plethora of other comics on the market.

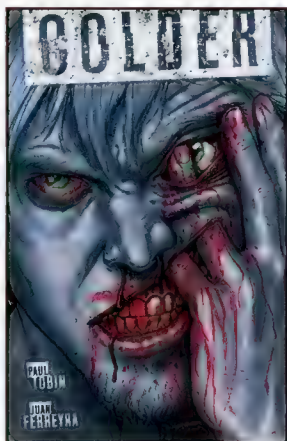
Scott: "Talent, integrity, quality... We're working with great people, and we're looking for something interesting that we can allow to breathe. With *Colder*, last year's series from Paul Tobin and Juan Ferreyra. I'd worked with them on a series called *Falling Skies*, a TV spinoff. They'd never worked together before that, but their stuff clicked, and so I asked Paul for a horror pitch. Paul is not primarily a horror guy, and Juan had never considered himself one, but I got a good pitch out of Paul, and it let loose something in both of them that generated a really bizarre comics. We have something coming up ... a writer I'd wanted to work with for YEARS. I can't say what it is yet, but we had coffee one day, and he pitched me a couple things, and we both sort of knew the first one wasn't done cooking. Then he started talking about this other thing, and his description was already so vivid, and the idea was so fresh—I think I just looked at him and said, 'You know this is the one you've gotta do,' and I think he had just realized it, listening to himself. You get the talent you want to work with, then you find the idea with them that really sings, that really does something, that you know they of all people can really nail. And then you have a comic.

When Sierra Hahn put together the lineup for Guillermo's *The Strain*... it was exciting. David Lapham has done a lot of

adaptation and other stuff like this, but there was something about this job where it felt like, 'Wow, we're not just getting the writer of *Modern Warfare*, we're getting the creator of *Stray fucking Bullets*!' And Mike Huddleston ... this was someone whose work Guillermo had been a fan of for years, for doing some weird comics of his own. Forget that *The Strain* is a novel series, soon to be a TV series... don't YOU want to read a horror comic by Lapham and Huddleston? I sure as shit do.

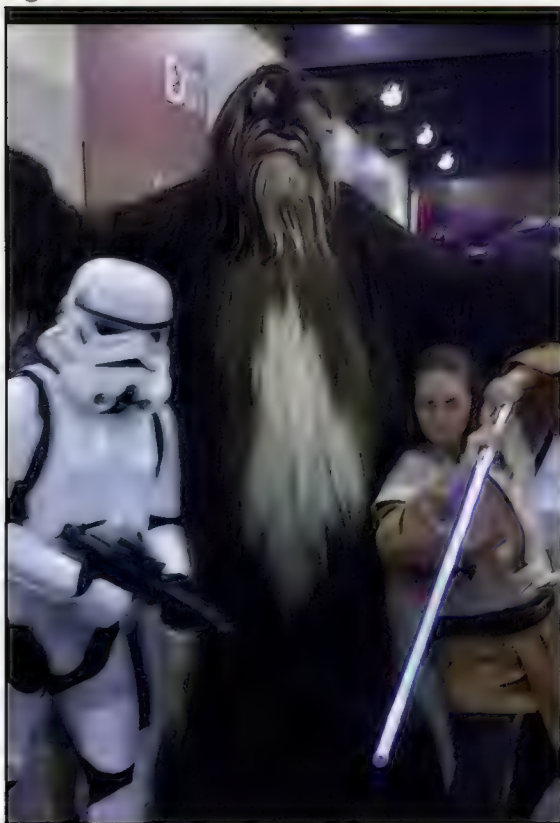
It's really all about the creators, but it's not these creators doing just anything... they're tackling some bizarre material, and doing so unflinchingly."

If Scott's purpose in 2003 was to make the company synonymous with horror, then he has definitely succeeded. *Hellboy*, *Criminal Macabre*, *The Goon*, *The Strain*, and the re-launched *Creepy* have become the backbone of a comic line that predominates the horror genre and the new titles just strengthen their lead. Dark Horse Comics has been an industry leader in the horror genre for far more than a decade and I see that continuing for many years to come.



SUN, SEA, AND SDCC

by Rich Johnston



As well as a place that celebrates stories, San Diego Comic Con is also a place where stories grow.

Comics, movies, and TV shows are pitched from person to person, condensed in such a comparatively small area (though tell that to your feet on Sunday). Once, in the line at Ralph's convenience store, I found myself next to Dark Horse Comics publisher, Mike Richardson. We got chatting; he asked if I had anything he could run of mine in *Dark Horse Presents*. Turns out I did. One handshake later the deal was done. And the second "Many Murders Of Miss Cranbourne" story is running later this year!

THE SEX

San Diego Comic Con is also a place where romance can bloom. Or what passes for it behind the bushes lining the route between the Convention Center, the Marriott, and the Hyatt hotels.

I know of one young woman who was the target of affection from three... not that young men. They all ended up invited back to her hotel room – but one of the three men was the publisher, the other two were mere writers, both married at that. Seniority was imposed; one writer knew the score and managed to drag the second writer out of the room. All was fine – until in the lobby, the second writer realised he'd left his bag in said suite. He was forced to interrupt the now rather active couple – and he never worked for that publisher again.

Not to worry though, karma bit back. A few San Diegos later, the publisher in question woke up in his hotel room to the sounds of his co-worker getting an early morning wakeup call from a young groupie. And he had to pretend he was asleep for the next hour (or possibly five minutes, depending who's telling the story).

Then there was the publisher and the senior artist who must have been trying to get caught in the act. They expressed their love rather publicly and repeatedly at the show over several years.



Of course, that was before the internet. In the weeks before the show, there are always plenty of listings on Craigslist, often looking for fleeting hook-ups, and mostly between men. But one listing sticks in the mind, from a guy working at the Marvel booth who said he could get the right lady into the right parties, if only she'd hook up with him. From what I understand, it worked.

Given the price and scarcity of hotel rooms close to the show, it's not uncommon for certain members of the young and the fit brigade to trade on their good looks to arrange sleeping accommodation. But one such person with a bit of a reputation in that regard was horrified when their actions

at Comic Con got back to their conservative politics think tank bosses.

But not all assignments take place in the fully booked hotel rooms. There was the night that two Vampirella cosplayers decided that they were overdressed and they wanted to party together in one of the hotel water features. They were much admired by the comic book professionals in the nearby bar.

And there have been reported many suspicious shuffling of coats and sleeping bags in the queues lining up outside Hall J through the night, as the prospect of seeing actors from *Twilight* clearly get the better of some people. And the various smells emanating from the line can be rather... intoxicating.



THE DRUGS

One comic book creator, famed for his love of the green stuff, has cultivated a fan base that is very aware of his tastes. Which is why he was carrying around, quite openly, a child-sized transparent bag of the dried plant in question at the bar one evening, and asking people to buy it drinks. We're sure it was only for medicinal purposes.

It would have come in handy a decade or two earlier when one DC staffer was given the responsibility of scoring all manner of drugs for the incoming British Vertigo contingent, to keep them all happy and blissed out while in San Diego. This means when she was eventually pushed out from the publisher, there was much despair as no one

stepped up to continue her role...

But there's one story from the seventies that sums up the decade – and a slightly looser drugs policy. During the Eisner Awards keynote speech by the writer of *Logan's Run* and the book behind *Ocean's 11*, George Clayton Johnson, he called out to Image Comics founder Jim Valentino, asking if he had a joint on him. Valentino shouted back that he did, Johnson demanded that he pass it up. Johnson lit it on stage, took a massive puff, and then handed it back, mid-speech.

You just don't get Keynote speeches like that anymore.



Illustration by JORDAN C. M.

THE VIOLENCE

There are fights, of course. That is one of the reasons why there are strict rules on cosplay weaponry, swords, and guns being holstered, even if they're made of plastic. However, that won't stop some people.



Such as the fan that stabbed another fan in the eye with a ballpoint pen over a seat space in Hall H and was arrested. Shortly after, we began to see cosplayers dressing with injury-to-the-eye motifs and placards reading "I Lined Up For Hall H And All I Got Was This Lousy Pen." There's no such thing as "too soon" at San Diego.

But it's the professionals who you really have to watch out for. One San Diego Comic Con saw a comic book artist jumped on the show floor by two friends of a famous comics writer he'd insulted. The same weekend, there was a bar fight over lascivious sug-



gestions made by one creator towards another creator's young niece, which saw bottles being swung, blood being drawn, and an onlooker fainting and breaking his jaw – having to hold it in place when getting a taxi to a hospital because he wasn't insured for an ambulance ride.

And there were the two Marvel co-workers who started swinging at each other at the Hyatt bar, the police were called, but by then wiser minds had separated the two either side of the convention center. But not before Nicky Barrucci, Publisher of Dynamite, had

knocked over a nicely expensive glass bowl onto the hotel floor,

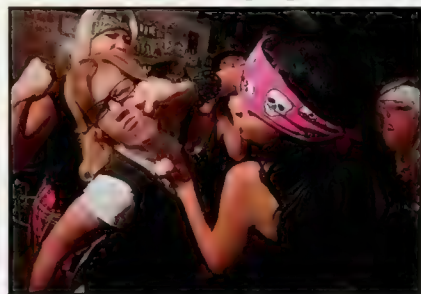
smashing it to pieces. A fun night was had by all, with a few headaches in the morning.

There's also the matter of San Diego being on the border of Mexico and many a trip being organised to Tijuana by a publisher trying to look edgy, which then ended up starting bar fights in the murder capital of the Americas. And occasionally leaving people abandoned in another country trying to get back without passports or documentation. Always fun.

As the show ends, so there are always the dead dog parties. Mostly amiable affairs, there is one that sticks out, where one A-lister started a bar fight so that he could get to the bar, but left a battle in his wake spilling out into the street with plenty of now-well known writers swinging back and forth with

bouncers, including one using his cane, smashing into Pedi cabs. The bar owner promptly fired all the bouncers and let the creators all back in, except for Josh Dysart. Who then had to spend the next half hour running around San Diego with another writer trying to avoid these recently fired bouncers looking for him...

He could have probably done having with Shi creator, Billy Tucci at his side. Who, when a six foot six creep kept hassling him and his then fiancée on his way to the hotel, or more specifically her then thirteen year old sister, culminating in the line "she



does have a sweet little ass." Well that was enough, five foot Billy laid into him, knocking him to the ground and beating on him with all his military training, leaving his fiancée to clear up the money flying from the cash-box he'd dropped. Billy got the upper hand and eventually let the creep and his friend go. His fiancée was worried about the teeth marks on Billy's drawing hand, from pounding on the creep's face... But more so when he showed his bicep with teeth still embedded in a bite mark. Which meant a trip to hospital for a tetanus jab...

There are also the self-inflicted acts of violence, such as Andy Kuhn while rather drunk taking a head first dive into a hot tub, smacking his head on the floor but

thankfully not breaking his neck. He did however have panda eyes for the whole show...

THE COSPLAY

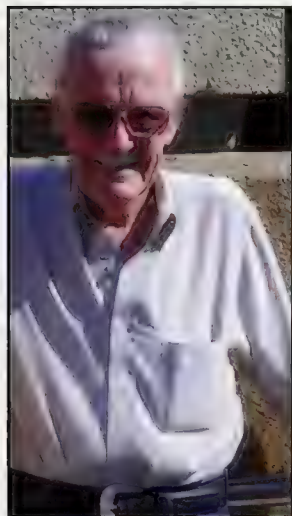
We should feel sorry for the actor who loves Comic Con. If they are on an even semi-successful show, they have a hard time walking around the floor without being mobbed. Which has seen some resort to cosplaying in order to disguise themselves. Simon Pegg was a Joker once, Naveen Andrews of *Lost* grabbed a V For Vendetta mask to browse Artist's Alley, and Bruce Willis? He just put a bag on his head, only taking it off when he got to the doors, giving a shocked crowd a wave as he left the show.





Though *Punisher* star Thomas Jane didn't seem to need any disguise when he was seen peeing against the Hyatt hotel wall one evening. On the outside, of course.

But I always liked this one from a well-known volunteer at the show, when she was managing Bruce Campbell's signing.



Me: "Holy shit. That's Stan Lee!"

Bruce: (Glances up) "Yup." (Continues to sign autographs)

Me: "Umm... He's coming this way."

Bruce: (Glances up) "Uh-huh." (Continues to sign autographs)

Me: "Bruce. He's coming over here."

Bruce: (Glances up)

"He's not here yet, baby." (Finishes one more autograph)

I make eye contact with the Elite (security) guy, just in case the people in line go completely apeshit.

Then The Man and The King do a guy hug and the crowd goes wild, cameras everywhere light up. The volunteers and I snap pics for people while the pair stand there talking and smiling at each other. Then Stan leaves.

Me: "So. You know him, huh?"

Bruce: "Yeah. Great guy." (Continues signing autographs)

Everyone knows each other. Comic book creation can be a solitary business. For some people, San Diego Comic Con is the only time they get to see some of their dearest friends and one or two enemies. That is why the show will always create as many stories as it celebrates...



FATHOM: REBORN

Interview with creators JT Krul and David Wohl
by David Marks

Aspen Matthews, the SoCal-fem inspired protagonist of Michael Turner's *Fathom*, may not be as familiar to the world as Wolverine, but she is as recognizable as any superhero to the long box collector, convention goer, and comic shop regular. As covered in previous issues of *Bleeding Cool Magazine*, Aspen MLT is celebrating a decade of publishing with ten new series via 2013's "10 for 10" initiative. Some titles are familiar, others wholly new, but rightfully so the *Fathom* universe and its matriarch are a primary focus among the schedule of releases. *Fathom: The Elite Saga* is a five part series beginning June 19, and it will be released through comic shops on

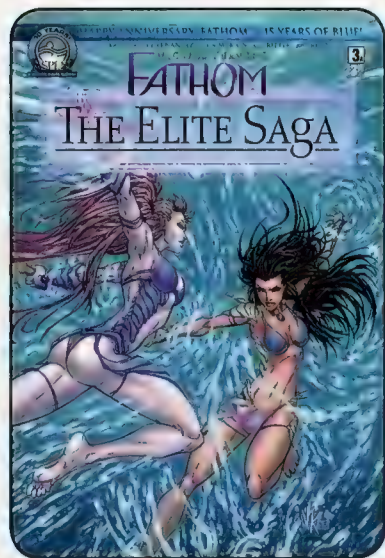
a weekly schedule. Then following in the wake of *The Elite Saga*, and just in time for San Diego Comic-Con, *Fathom* #1 kicks off a milestone series 15 years in the making. The first issue is priced at only \$1 is perfect for new readers looking to discover the title and enter this colorful world.

Recently, I was able to ask some questions of authors J.T. Krul and David Wohl about their thoughts on the milestone, upcoming series, and among other things, *Fathom*'s fan base, history, and evolution through the years. David Wohl's resume boasts editorial roles at a few of the industry's premier publishers, co-creating titles such as *The Darkness* and *Witchblade*, and numerous writing credits in multiple mediums. JT Krul has been authoring major titles at Aspen MLT, Marvel, DC and other publishers going on 10 years.



HOW DOES PENNING THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY SERIES OF MICHAEL TURNER'S *FATHOM* BRING ITS OWN SENSE OF MOTIVATION AND EXCITEMENT AT THIS STAGE IN YOUR CAREER?

David Wohl: You know, there's a very special place in my heart for *Fathom*. At the time that Michael first began talking about it, he and I were the creative team on *Witchblade*, and I was also the Editor in Chief of Top Cow, so it was sort of a bittersweet experience at first. I was lucky enough to be involved in much of the earliest development of the concept, and I got to see Michael grow as a creator and as an artist. On one hand (on a purely selfish level, I admit), I didn't want him to leave *Witchblade* to start his own book. I liked things the way they were [laughing]! I never said it out loud,



of course. I knew it was kinda silly of me. It was his natural evolution. And once we started seeing the art—I mean, wow. I thought his work on *Witchblade* was great, but with *Fathom*, well, he really took his art to a higher level, as did Peter (Steigerwald). When the series launched, I was proud that I could be part of it. Even back then, a part of me wanted to write the book—it was such a fertile landscape for stories! And now, 15 years later. I'm getting the chance to write it. So yeah, I'm definitely motivated and more than a little excited to be part of the new *Fathom* launch--and seeing the art by Alex Konat and Beth Sotelo is inspiring as well!

AS READERS, WE ALL UNDERSTAND HOW INTIMIDATING SUCH AN ESTABLISHED UNIVERSE OF CHARACTERS MAY SEEM, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT LIES OUTSIDE OUR NORMAL FARE. WHAT SORT OF FANS MIGHT BE SURPRISED THEY'VE WAITED SO LONG TO JUMP ON?

DW People always seem surprised at the number of women who are fans of the book. I guess that's another reason why this book was right for me. After all (working on books like *Witchblade*, *Aphrodite IX*, and *Executive Assistant: Iris*), you could say I have a history of being involved with books that, at first glance, might not seem like comics that women would like.



But all of them had a substantial female fan base as well. I believe that anyone who takes the time to read the book will see that we have a comic with a (very) strong female lead character, who is treated in a dignified fashion. And once they see that, it's understandable why women would like the book as much as men do.

SO FIRST UP IS A SERIES CALLED *FATHOM: THE ELITE SAGA* WHICH LAUNCHES IN JUNE. IT IS IN SOME WAYS THE HISTORICAL PIVOT POINT IN ASPEN'S HISTORY. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON HOW *THE ELITE SAGA* IS BOTH A BOOK END ON WHAT HAS COME BEFORE AS WELL AS A LAUNCHING POINT FOR *FATHOM'S* FUTURE?

JT Krul: Since *Fathom* first premiered, the world and mythology have grown over the years as we've introduced new characters and new corners of Aspen's world - Killian,

Cannon, Kiani, the existence of the Black, the world's discovery that the Blue exist, and the great battles that followed. It's a big world filled with dynamic, complex characters all finding their own way through life. *The Elite Saga* touches upon all of this. It is a pivot point for not only Aspen, but for many of the characters in the book. We really wanted to put everything we could into this story, so you'll be seeing a lot of familiar faces, and some new ones for certain, too. But, it's also designed to plant Aspen firmly in the center of the story once more - recalibrating the status quo as the book moves into its 5th volume by David Wohl and Alex Konat. It really sets the stage for a whole new chapter in *Fathom*. Not bad for a 15th anniversary.

THE ELITE SAGA WILL BE KICKING OFF MORE THAN A MONTH OF WEEKLY FATHOM RELEASES LEADING UP TO COMIC-CON. CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW THE ANTICIPATION FOR SUCH A CLOSE KNIT SERIES OF RELEASES, COMPOUNDED BY THE MILESTONE YEAR BOTH FOR THE TITLE AND PUBLISHER, MAY DIFFER FROM A REGULAR MONTHLY RELEASE SCHEDULE?

JT To say that Aspen is pulling out all the stops for their tenth anniversary would be way understating it. First, they have the 10-for-10 initiative where ten new series

And, they are also celebrating *Fathom*'s 15th anniversary with *The Elite Saga*. It's intense. As a writer on *Jirni*, *Soulfire*, and the *Fathom* event, my schedule has been rather busy, but that's nothing compared to the guys in the office. Frank (Mastromauro), Peter (Steigerwald), Vince (Hernandez), Mark (Roslan), and the rest are killing themselves to make this the biggest year for Aspen ever.

When it came to *Fathom*, we wanted to do something special for this year and that's why we put together *The Elite Saga*. It's been a total group effort as Vince, David Wohl, and I have worked together with Frank and Peter to put together a story that encapsulates everything that makes the world Mike (Turner) created shine. And with the weekly schedule, everything is ramped up to another level. It's exciting to be a part of it.

LOOKING BACK OVER THOSE 15 YEARS OF HISTORY, HOW HAS THIS STORIED PROTAGONIST EVOLVED FROM ADOLESCENT ORPHAN AND EVERYDAY STUDENT TO A NEARLY GODLIKE BEING?

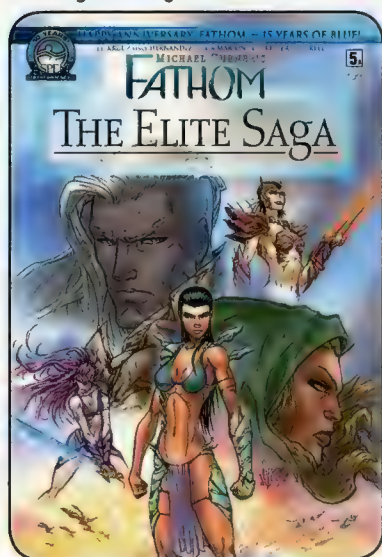
DW When *Fathom* first began, Aspen believed herself to be a normal person just struggling through her young life like everyone else. Then, over the course of several volumes, she discovered she had these incredible powers, was introduced to this undersea world that was previously unknown, and she was immersed in a great struggle between the surface world and those from below. But through it all, she



are being launched between February and November (with each premiere issue only being a \$1). Then, they are launching their first prose novel, my book *The Lost Spark*.

always tried to maintain her connection to humanity. Even after she embraced her powers, and her lineage, she never became jaded, nor did she forget where she came from, and I believe that's what keeps her relatable. The reader sees the world through her eyes, and her point of view is still distinctly human.

JT Much of Aspen's story has been about her trying to discover the truth about who she is and where she belongs. During that journey, she has been manipulated



a lot (mostly by Killian), but the truth is she's been pulled in many directions by those around her. She's often struggled to know which way is up. She's found some of the answers she

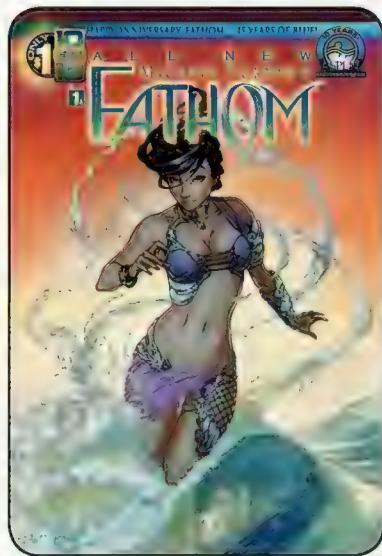
is looking for, and now she is mapping her own course - growing into her own, determining what she believes and what her purpose in this crazy world (or worlds) might be. I guess you could say she's becoming a master of her own destiny.

I kind of liken it to the post academic years. As adolescents, we spend all this time being taught and mentored by teachers and parents and other role models - trying to find the best aspects to emulate in our own lives. You want someone to show you the right path. But what you eventually learn is that nobody knows your path. Even you. Everything around you serves as a beacon, be it a calling or a warning. You chart your course and navigate the best you can, trying not to overreact to the signals and veer too wildly one way or the other. As you get

older, you come to rely more on your own compass. That's where Aspen is now.

FATHOM #1 WILL SEE ASPEN MATTHEWS WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE A RELATIVELY NORMAL LIFE AGAIN AT THE START OF THIS NEW SERIES. AFTER ALREADY LIVING A LARGE PART OF HER LIFE SURVIVING AND BATTLING EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES, HOW WILL THIS NEW CHAPTER IN HER STORY COMPARE, AND HOW WILL IT BEGIN TO UNRAVEL ON THE PAGE?

DW At the beginning of the story, Aspen will want nothing more than to resume her "normal" life in San Diego, but when she becomes aware of some strange occurrences happening on the surface, she soon realizes that someone from the Blue (the underwater race) may be responsible. Even then, her first instinct is to let them



handle it themselves so she can keep trying to live her new, quiet life. But like Michael Corleone, she can't help but get pulled back in... (Sorry about the *Godfather* reference)

BC - NO ONE NEED APOLOGIZE FOR COPPOLA, AND IT'S A PERFECT SEGUE INTO MOVIES... WILL YOU BOTH BE GUESTS AT COMIC-CON THIS YEAR?

JT I think it's safe to say this will be the biggest Aspen presence at San Diego Comic-Con ever. The booth will be jammed with all our books and some special new products exclusively for the show, not to mention loads of creators on hand to sign,

sketch, and just bask in the glow of all the stuff we are doing now.

BC - DAVID, YOU ARE WORKING ON *FATHOM #1* WITH ALEX KONAT AND COLORIST BETH SOTELO, OF COURSE A JAW DROPPING DUO OF ARTISTIC TALENT FROM ASPEN'S STABLE. HOW DOES HAVING SUCH A STRONG ARTISTIC TEAM CONTRIBUTING TO THIS SERIES AFFECT YOUR WRITING AND OUTLOOK ON SUCH A SEMINAL PROJECT LIKE THIS?

DW Oh, my God. It's INSPIRING! It's rare that an art team will, on a regular basis, out-do my imagination, but

they do! They never cease to amaze me, and I try to give them room to work their magic as much as possible. I must say, I look forward to seeing every page, and the only downside is that it takes a few months to get to the book printed and into stores, so everyone can see what I see!

Fans will be able to finally see Fathom: The Elite Saga, a five part weekly series, beginning June 19th. Fathom #1 will also be available just in time for Comic-Con, kicking off the next chapter in Aspen Matthew's epic story for only \$1.



DAY MEN REVEALED

CREATOR-ON-CREATOR INTERVIEW

Matt Gagnon and Michael Alan Nelson



DAY MEN REVEALED

Creator-on-Creator Interview with
Matt Gagnon and Michael Alan Nelson

BOOM! has a lot of exciting new projects coming up in their summer lineup. But one of the books that has the most interesting twist is the upcoming title, *Day Men*. Written by Matt Gagnon and Michael Alan Nelson with art by Brian Stelfreeze, this new take on vampires and their henchmen promises to give vampire fans something they haven't seen before. In this world, 50 families of vampires run the world by night, but during the day, it is the Day Men that actually implement the calculated moves of the plotting dead. In what appears to be a cross between *30 Days of Night* and *James Bond*, we meet the highly trained killers that turn the vampire's bidding into reality.

The co-creators sat down with *Bleeding Cool Magazine* to give us a behind-the-scenes look at the comic, its creation, and how they use writing to exorcise the demons from their dreams.

MG Hey Mike, I'm sitting down to do this interview and I'm realizing that even though you're my friend, and my co-writer on *Day Men*, there are still a lot of questions I'm dying to ask you.

Which has me wondering, are you living some kind of private, double life, never giving too much away, but always watching...watching...?

MAN Have you ever played Unreal

Tournament? It's an old FPS that I just loved back in the day. And the thing I loved most was perching

high and sniping. I'm not saying I do that in real life, but the perching and watching is a pastime that I quite enjoy. Nothing weird.

MG This is already turning out to be quite revealing. All right, we're writing a vampire noir series called *Day Men* that's about a secret order of humans that are tasked with protecting their vampire employers during the day. You already have some experience writing hard-hitting supernatural stories like *Dingo* and *Hexed*. First of all, what fascinates you about nasty worlds where things go bump in the night? Secondly, how the hell did I con you into writing this with me?

MAN I was haunted by horrible nightmares as a kid. Not sure why. My family was great, no weird trauma or anything like that. But for some reason my brain just went to...dark places. And I've always been fascinated by those creepy crevices in my mind. So telling stories in those genres helps to exorcise those demons. As for writing with you, it's blackmail. Don't try and deny it.

No one ever needs to know about Toronto.

MG Ah, Toronto. I'll keep my oath of silence so long as the awesome pages keep coming in.

MAN But what about you? You're a straight-up guy, even-keeled and put-together. What has YOU fascinated about darker stories?

MG I love detective fiction, the crime genre, stories of desperate people in desperate situations. I've always been drawn to stories about life on the brink. I think it makes people ask the question, "What would I do in that situation?"

That's kind of what we're fusing to the vampire genre in *Day Men*, right? It's sort of where the noir of the "vampire noir" comes from.

MAN Yeah, I think that's what's really appealing about those kinds of stories. It's why I dig apocalyptic fiction so much. I keep thinking about what I would do in that situation. Though, I have no doubt that I'd probably be under the bed nursing a bottle of whiskey and whimpering.

No doubt about that. That's what I love about *Day Men*, the noir feel to it. It's all about what's hiding in the shadows. Looking at the situation and trying to determine what's important, what are the clues to what's happening.

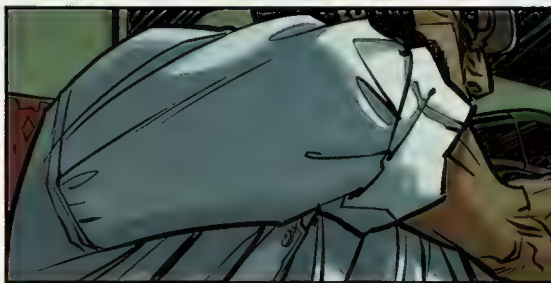
But it's interesting that you enjoy detective fiction so much. Do you see David, our protagonist in *Day Men*, as mainly a detective? Or is that just one of the many hats he has to wear?

MG There's likely an aspect of that to David's job. You'd probably agree, what's fun about writing David is he never knows what situations he'll be in when he wakes up in the morning. He could be tasked with tracking a bloodthirsty nomad vamp, or something as mundane as cleaning up a "feeding accident." I love characters that face impossible challenges and have to figure it out.

MAN You're dead-on. That's my favorite part about writing David. I like protagonists that have to THINK. Don't get me wrong, I love people who can handle themselves and throw down when it's necessary, but brawn without brains is just boring. But David HAS to think. Like you said, he never knows what he's going to face so he has to be ready for anything.

MG So back in the day, in the dark era before Twitters and Tumblrs, you got your start writing prose fiction on the Internet. When did you know you wanted to be a writer?

MAN I was 11 years old when I knew I wanted to be a writer. There's a trilogy of books by Fred Saberhagen called *The*





Book of Swords (First, Second, and Third). And the very first sentence of the first book and the very last sentence of the last book were identical, yet had a completely different meaning because of the story that happened in-between. When I read that, the top of my head came off. I said to myself, **THAT'S** what I want to do. I want to create moments like that. How about you? If I'm not mistaken, you studied film. Did you want to be a filmmaker before being a writer?

MG I love that moment where a story changes you forever. I still remember my first *X-Men* comic, I still remember the first time I read Salinger. It's like a tattoo of the soul.

Comics were always my first love. I did study film, and have a lot of love for the genre. But ever since I started making my own comics when I was 19, I've never stopped. Even during the times I didn't have an outlet or any prospects, I'd still be jotting down comic book ideas. As Editor-in-Chief of *BOOM!*, I'm in a position where I can help talented people tell their own stories and it's incredibly rewarding. I've had sporadic dalliances with Hollywood over the years, but comics have always been a constant. Speaking of film, what are your primary film influences? Actually, influences in any medium. If we were to create a mood board for Michael Alan Nelson, what influences would we see on there?

MAN That is a tough question to answer. My tastes are all over the place. I'm a huge Joss Whedon fan, so anything by him is a must. My favorite movie is *The Princess Bride*.

That's probably a surprise to most people since I really like writing darker stories. I guess I would say that I like anything that's done well. Though I do tend to gravitate toward the speculative, I also have a soft spot for shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Sherlock* (which I think is one of the best shows ever made, hands down). I just really like good storytelling, regardless of the genre or medium. And we're fortunate to live in an age where there is so much great

storytelling out there that it's easy to feel overwhelmed.

How much would it cost to see that comic you made when you were 19?

MG You're right, I wouldn't have pegged you for *The Princess Bride* but, yeah, incredible movie. I have to admit, I'm also a *Downton Abbey* fan. I didn't know you were too. Man, we're just revealing ourselves to be a bunch of softies. After the interview we can talk about our *Downton Abbey* crushes. As for the comics I made in my youth, I probably have some stuff on a zip drive (yes, a zip drive) somewhere. Mike, a reminder... Brian Stelfreeze is drawing this comic!!! What kind of karma do we have going to be working with a living legend? I honestly still can't believe sometimes that he's drawing this series.

MAN Yeah, I still don't believe it. I mean, I really don't believe it. I honestly think you broke into his studio and stole a ton of his work or kidnapped his kitten or something. It's the only way I can explain it. You see the same pages I do and I can't get over how he's able to take our scripts and do what he does. That cover for Issue #2? Blew my mind. It's not just that it looks amazing, it's the detail of the piece that just floors me. The way David's shadow keeps part of the vampire from burning in the sun is such a brilliant visual and, you would think, obvious one. But it never would have occurred to me. And he's bringing that brilliance to every single page! It's unreal!

MG It's funny, I'm excited as both a collaborator on the series and a fan of Brian's work. Every time a page comes in I feel like I'm a giddy kid again.

MAN It's always a wonderful experience to work with people that inspire you.

MG Yeah, this is easily one of the best professional experiences of my life. I've seen this as an editor—and you have too as a writer when things are really working on a series it feels like magic. It was like that when we worked with Emma and Cris on *Hexed*. You can feel it when things are really clicking.



WOLVERINE SET REPORT

by Brendon Connelly

I've never been a sun chaser, always happier in the shade, and I'm actually quite fond of snow. Late last year, though, as British skies were settling in for a few unbroken months of grey, I was packed off to Sydney on a mission for Bleeding Cool. Down there, the Gold Coast's roasting summer was just getting started.

Now, I'm certainly not complaining. Because even before I stepped onto the set and saw with my own two eyes what they were up to, *The Wolverine* was commanding my attention. I've been looking forward to this film for a very, very long time now.

I suppose the seeds were sewn over a decade ago. Back in 2000, I found myself hooked from the very first minutes of Bryan Singer's first *X-Men* movie. Those

unashamedly serious and dramatically ambitious opening scenes set a tone and some considerable expectations.

And then he absolutely trumped himself. Singer's second film in the series, *X2*, still ranks amongst my favourite 'action adventure' films, if that's what it even is. It's an action adventure drama thriller satire character piece - with superpowers.

But I think it's fair to say that X-movies have fared less well under other directors. Brett Ratner's *Last Stand* was an almighty mess, and the worst of it was just boring. A few years back, Gavin Hood took the first shot at spinning-off Wolverine, and despite a number of smart ideas and some well-crafted filmmaking, I think we'll agree that the overall end result was somewhat compromised.

And then, most recently, there was Matthew Vaughn's *First Class*. I actually really loved it, but - keeping my thesis intact



- the film benefited from Bryan Singer's close involvement. Singer was *First Class*' originally attached director, he developed the story and, in his capacity as producer, had a strong influence on the casting.

So the superstitious - or bookmakers, or weather forecasters - might show some concern for the prospects of *The Wolverine*, which appears to have been made almost entirely without Singer's involvement. Having said that, the film's screenplay has been built up from a draft by Christopher McQuarrie - the author of Singer's *Usual Suspects* and *Valkyrie*. Maybe we can take that as a good omen. Better still, I actually read McQuarrie's draft, a couple of years back, and it hacked out a really exciting take on the classic Logan in Japan storyline from the comics.

Since then, Mark Bombback has done a rewrite, director James Mangold worked on the script a lot himself, and - though this hasn't been widely discussed in the public arena, I was told it plainly, during my visit - *The Lookout* and *Out of Sight*'s Scott Frank has made a pass too. Good news, as Frank

is a truly fantastic screenwriter.

But the work is only just beginning when the keyboards fall silent. These pages then have to go into the hands of the actors, the designers, the camera crew, and whole hordes of heavy-lifters charged with turning words and ideas into something an audience will actually be able to see and hear in their cinemas.

During my visit to the set, James Mangold and company were filming a grand and dramatic scene that explodes into an intense action set piece. For this sequence, almost all of the film's key characters are gathered at the funeral of Master Yashida. Also present are representatives from different factions of the Japanese underworld. It's a very volatile mix.

So what starts off as a high-pressure tight rope walk of gangster politics is just one false move and a Snikt! away from a full-on rumble.

Some of the funeral scene had already been filmed at Tokyo's Zojoji temple, but the action planned meant that the filmmakers needed somewhere more manageable,





somewhere suitable for bigger stunt work. The production had selected Sydney's Chinese Garden of Friendship in Darling Harbour, not too far from Fox's Australian studios.

But Chinese architecture, despite some obvious similarities, is actually rather distinct from the Japanese style. This meant a lot of exacting work for the production design department, tweaking, building over, in front of and around anything that was identifiably Chinese.

One of the more minor benefits of casting Japanese actors in the film's many Japanese roles was that they were able to "proofread" the sets. I spoke to several of the cast during my visit, and they were all able to give me an example of

something in the garden that they'd asked the production design team to alter.

I saw a lot of the fight choreography happening, on set, and then later, replayed on monitors. This controlled chaos really did look great in the flesh, but it was better still

on screen.

Rila Fukushima, playing the "orphaned assassin" Yukio, had never done any fight training before starting this film just a few weeks before, but you'd never have guessed it. She cut incredible forms as she swirled and slashed her way through the crowds, her redder-than-red hair popping against the green of the gardens and the blue of that summer sky. She looked like a fan-favourite character poster waiting to happen.



Svetlana Khodchenkova, playing The Viper, was keeping out of action while I was on set, but she certainly had the snake-eyed glare perfected. I saw one shot on the monitors that shifted focus from Yukio in full flow in the foreground to The Viper, staring at her intently, threateningly from the distance. It was delicious.

At one point I saw Hugh Jackman, claws out, veins about to burst, and with the most intense rage burning up his face, as he came running along a path in the garden and - whoosh - suddenly hurled himself up into the air, grabbing hold of a pagoda roof. He had flown something like fourteen feet before I realised that, yes, he was hanging on a harness, a crane up above and out of sight making

his superhuman move possible. For a few seconds, it looked completely real, though - and, excitingly, the veil of illusion slipped right back into place when I saw the stunt played back on the monitors.

During a break between throwing himself in the air and cutting down Yakuza, Jackman stepped off set for a chat. Before I knew it, he'd slipped off his claws, handed them to me, and was teaching me how to use them.

They seem to work in a very simple fashion, being mounted on a grip that Hugh - or for one exciting minute, little old me - will hold in the palm. There's something knuckledustery about the fit. It's pretty obvious, but there is a trick to really getting it right, and as Wolverine's not too





distant cousin Jack Burton would say, it's all in the wrist.

Jackman understands just how to sell the idea that these blades are really protruding from between his knuckles and run deep into his arms, rooted in his adamantium skeleton. I tried out a few poses myself and it was clear; the blades just looked "wrong" when I didn't position my hand properly. Showing my "bad pose" around, I learned that it wasn't immediately obvious to observers why it looked wrong, just that it did. As demonstrated by Jackman, though, it looked simple - you just have to keep your wrists locked at the right angle. Otherwise, as he said me, he'd just be slicing his own hands up from the inside.

For the new film they've redesigned the blades, changed the material they're made from, and sculpted them to better catch the light. They now have a kind of "faceted edge," and this results in a more dynamic, defined look on screen while looking exactly as you'd remember or expect.

And I guess that's a pretty good microcosm for what they've done overall. This

film shows you the Wolverine you remember, and Jackman is playing it much as you'd expect, but there are new facets, and extra dimensions...

For more on *The Wolverine*, you can find my full interviews with the film's cast and crew in the archives at BleedingCool.com. There are interviews with Jackman and Mangold, the film's designers and producers, and many of the Japanese cast members - enough to fill several copies of this magazine.

The Wolverine is released on July 24th in the US and July 25th in the UK.



ROCKETING SPIRITS

A Retrospective Look at The Rocketeer and The Spirit
by James Kuhoric



There have been many famous combinations over the years - peanut butter and jelly, Hall and Oats, and even rock and roll - but has there ever been a comic book duo who are more a natural fit than the Rocketeer and the Spirit? Both are from industry giants whose talent and personalities were absolute joys to behold. Both embody the "spirit" of what makes comics great, that magical combination of unbridled imagination and belief that anything is possible. And both took the golden age of pulp heroes as their inspiration for comic book adventures, even though there are forty-two years between their respective premieres in comics.

The Spirit debuted in 1942, in a sixteen-page newspaper supplement, which at the time was the most far reaching entertainment delivery system of the day. Those newspapers reached an estimated five





million readers in the 1940s, and every kid was grabbing for the *Spirit Section* when their fathers sat down to read the paper. Unfolding on the newsprint page were the amazing adventures of Denny Colt, a hard-luck masked vigilante who fought crime with the help of a colorful cast of friends and foes. Will Eisner, who was editing the section for the paper, was also writing and drawing the series during the early days, before handing the duties to some big name collaborators that included Jack Cole, Wally Wood, Joe Kubert, and Jules Feiffer. And for the next seventy years, the Spirit would make appearances with multiple publishers including Harvey Comics, Warren Comics, Kitchen Sink, and DC Comics, before ultimate landing with IDW.

Will Eisner was an innovator, a visionary, and a huge proponent of the comic book medium. Starting his career in 1935 when he was eighteen years old, Eisner began working with his high school friend Bob Kane, who would later go on to create Batman,







to break into the relatively new field of comic books. Comics at the time were basically tabloid publications that reprinted comic strips but they were developing into the format we would come to know as the modern comic book. He would contribute cartoons and scripts to several publications of the era before eventually getting the opportunity in 1939 to bring *the Spirit* to life in the funny papers. Eisner stayed in comics while lecturing about sequential art for virtually his entire life. In 1978 he popularized the term “graphic novel” with the publication of *A Contract with God, and Other Tenement Stories*. He would publish graphic novels based on his own experiences and be an early comics education contributor with his seminal titles; *Comics and Sequential Art* and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*. Will Eisner earned a place among the legends in the field and is discussed in the same conversation as Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Jerry Siegel, and Joe Shuster. Will died in January 2005 at the age of 87, following a lifetime of making comics readers smile.

The Rocketeer debuted in 1982 in the pages of Mike Grell’s *Starslayer* series, published by Pacific Comics as a backup feature. Dave Stevens created Cliff Secord, a likeable pilot who finds an experimental rocket jetpack that he uses to become a reluctantly high-flying hero. His influences for the character came from the same era as the *Spirit*, but drew inspiration from the sci-fi heroes of the day, like the *King of the Rocket Men*. With a mix of Steven’s beautiful Normal Rockwell inspired art and its nostalgic throwback

to a simpler generation, *The Rocketeer* was an instant hit with comic fans. Pacific would give way to Eclipse Comics, Comico Comics, Dark Horse Comics, and would eventually touchdown with IDW and find a home for the character.

Dave Stevens was a dreamer. The images in his head created characters that would influence artists and fans alike through the adventures of the Rocketeer. Growing up around San Diego Comic Con, he broke into the field working with Russ Manning on the *Tarzan* newspaper strip and graphic novels. This work led him to animation, where he did storyboarding for Hanna-Barbera's television cartoons. But it was in 1982 when his signature character would rocket onto comics and create an instant buzz with fans. His pulp style drew influence from an age gone by and created something wholly original that captured the imagination and the hearts of his readers. Dave's love for 1950's pin up model, Bettie Page, led to him modeling his character's girlfriend after her and helped to reignite interest in Page with new generations of fans as well. The stories eventually were packaged into film rights for Walt Disney, who in turn produced *The Rocketeer* movie in 1991. Dave Stevens was 52 when died, far too young, from Hairy Cell Leukemia in 2008.

Eisner and Stevens were two different men, with two different characters, and from two different eras, that gave us the same exhilarating result. Both of their legacies, as creators of wonderful characters and as men who spread joy to their family, friends, and fans, extend giant shadows. Their influence is felt in new and old generations of comic artists. And anyone who undertakes the task of representing their characters and ideas has gargantuan shoes to fill.

Enter IDW and *Rocketeer / The Spirit: Pulp Friction*. Over the last few years, Chris Ryall has shown us two things that we can count on: one – that the IDW crew has a



ROCKETEER[®]

WILL
EISNER'S

THE SPIRIT



great eye for properties that comic fans love; and two – that IDW goes beyond the simple licensing gig with their books, and genuinely builds a labor of love with the comics and characters on which they put their name. They find the right editors, creators, and contributors for the project and then they accept nothing short of perfection. And they need that kind of dedication to make this project as special as it has to be. The first step is to find someone you can entrust to put the kind of care and attention to detail to do this ambitious project justice. Mark Waid is someone who has shown that he can take characters from the biggest pantheons and tell wonderfully touching stories about. Anyone who has read *Kingdom Come* knows that Waid has the chops to do what others fear with iconic characters. If I had to make a list of the guys I'd trust to write this book, Waid would be my first and only choice. Knowing he is at the reins excites me as a fan and makes me believe in this project from the onset. Add in an artist like Paul Smith, a guy who worked on the animated *Lord of the Rings* and has delivered fantastic comics for over thirty years, and Darywn Cooke on the subscription variant covers, and you have an art team that is proven to be up to the challenge. They understand what has been handed to them and I think we are going to see an amazing homage to the men that created these fan favorite characters.

We know that the creative foundation of the book is built on stone. But how will it hold up against the legacies of the legends that created these characters? When we lost Eisner and Stevens, the comic book world was a much less wonderful place. The light they shone was so bright that we are all a little worse off in its absence. But this project gives us a flicker of their creativity back in a wonderful and appropriately reverent way. *Rocketeer / The Spirit: Pulp Friction* is a love letter to characters and creators that I can't wait to read.

DROPPED IN THE MIDDLE

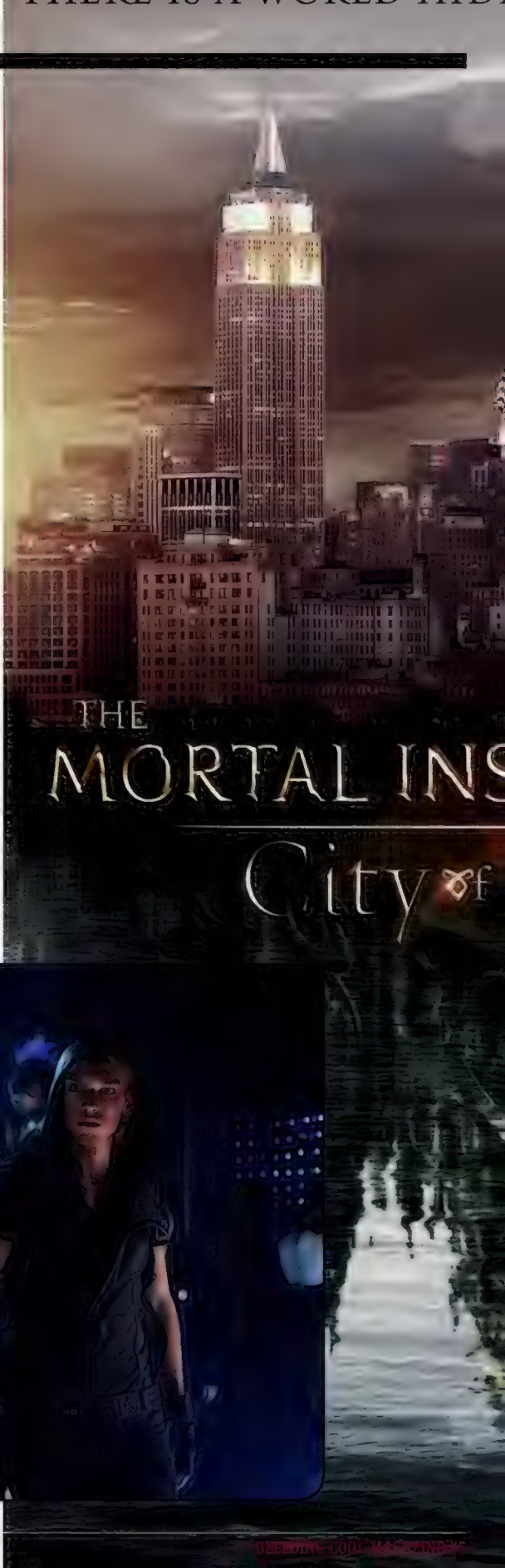
A LOOK AT *MORTAL INSTRUMENTS: CITY OF BONES*
by **Brendon Connelly**

When the teenage demon hunter Clary Fray makes her big screen debut in this August's *Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, it will be just the beginning for movies set inside novelist Cassandra Clare's universe of *Shadowhunters* and *Downworlders*.

But actually, it won't be the beginning of the story. It will be the middle.

George Lucas had a lot of powerful ideas. One was dropping us into the *Star Wars* saga part way through, or at least later pretending that's what he was doing all along. Then, a few years later, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* ended up being a prequel to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Looks to me like George Lucas really has a thing about storytelling in episodes, and this love proved very infectious.

More recently, Marvel has shaken things up again. Their shared 'Cinematic Universe,' carved out through the Phase One movies and given a shiny coat of sealant by *The Avengers*, might prove to be just as influential as Lucas' prequelising, if not more so.





Movie-to-movie crossovers are in right now, and I can understand why. Audiences don't care about a film studio "expanding the brand," but they do appreciate an opened-up world. They do like having more doorways into the drama.

So, even before *Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* is in cinemas, Constantin Films have screenwriters working on both a prequel and a sequel. As well as scheduling a fall shoot for *The City of Bones* follow up, *City of Ashes*, producers have also set screenwriter Stephanie Sanditz to work on a script for a prequel, *Infernal Devices*.

Though plans are being kept more or less under wraps for now, we believe this one has been designed to adapt three of Clare's novels (*Clockwork Angel*, *Clockwork Prince* and *Clockwork Princess*) into a single movie.

Bones and *Ashes* take place in present day New York - if not entirely on our plane of existence - while *Infernal Devices* will be a Victorian period piece set in England. Nevertheless, a cast of supernatural characters ensure that some of the same faces will be turning up in both. What's more, events in *Infernal Devices* will throw long shadows that effect characters over a Century later



on the opposite side of the Atlantic. It's that movie crossover fun again. This stuff can be a real kick.

Clare also has plans for another, third series, though we're some way away from these becoming movies. She's given the third sub-series the working title of *The Dark Artifices*, saying that its story "takes place five years after the end of *The Mortal Instruments*." It won't be a direct sequel, however, having only "a tangential connection to the characters of *Mortal Instruments*. They are not main characters. The main characters are teens - meaning that during the events of *The Mortal Instruments* they'd be 11, 12 years old."

But let's not get ahead of and behind ourselves. Let's go back to the middle.

In recent years, we've seen an incredible amount of movies adapted from "young adult" novels and there seem to have been two big influences that brought this craze about. First there was *Harry Potter*, which is still the box-office benchmark, and then there was *Twilight*.

Those movies have already made their reputation, and we don't need to get into that here, but rather a lot of these "young adult" movies have actually turned out

rather well. *The Hunger Games* was smart, urgent and exciting, *Beautiful Creatures* was rich and engaging and teen zom-com *Warm Bodies* was funny and inventive.

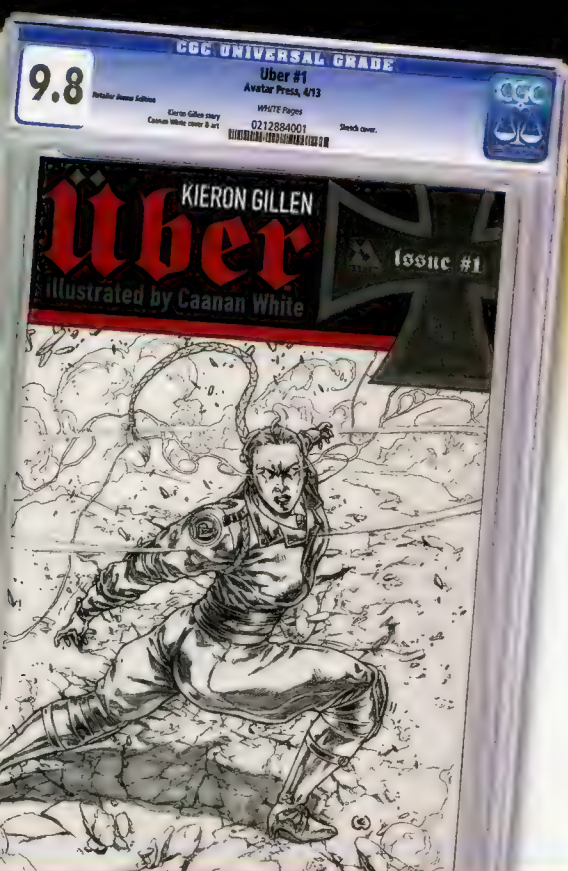
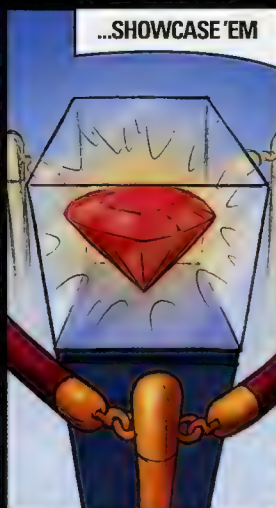
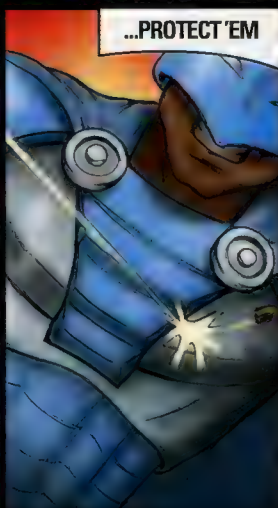
We're hoping *Mortal Instruments* will come out on top too. Signs are good - for one thing, there's that support from the producers that has seen money being invested in not just one but two more films before even a single ticket has been sold to the first. By the time that *City of Bones* meets its audience in the marketplace, pre-production on the second film will be almost complete. That's confidence for you.

And then there are the original books which, according to YA lovers in my film class, feature a complex mythology, plenty of striking imagery and some great dramatic hooks. Some of the tropes are familiar - prophecies, second sight, the fate of the world in the hands of identifiable teenagers - but the appeal is proven.

I'm personally drawn most of all to the gas lamp fantasy of *Infernal Devices*, but I'll definitely be clocking on for *Mortal Instruments* first of all - and keeping an eye open for clues as to how the films are all going to tie in together. After-credits teaser sequences, do you think?



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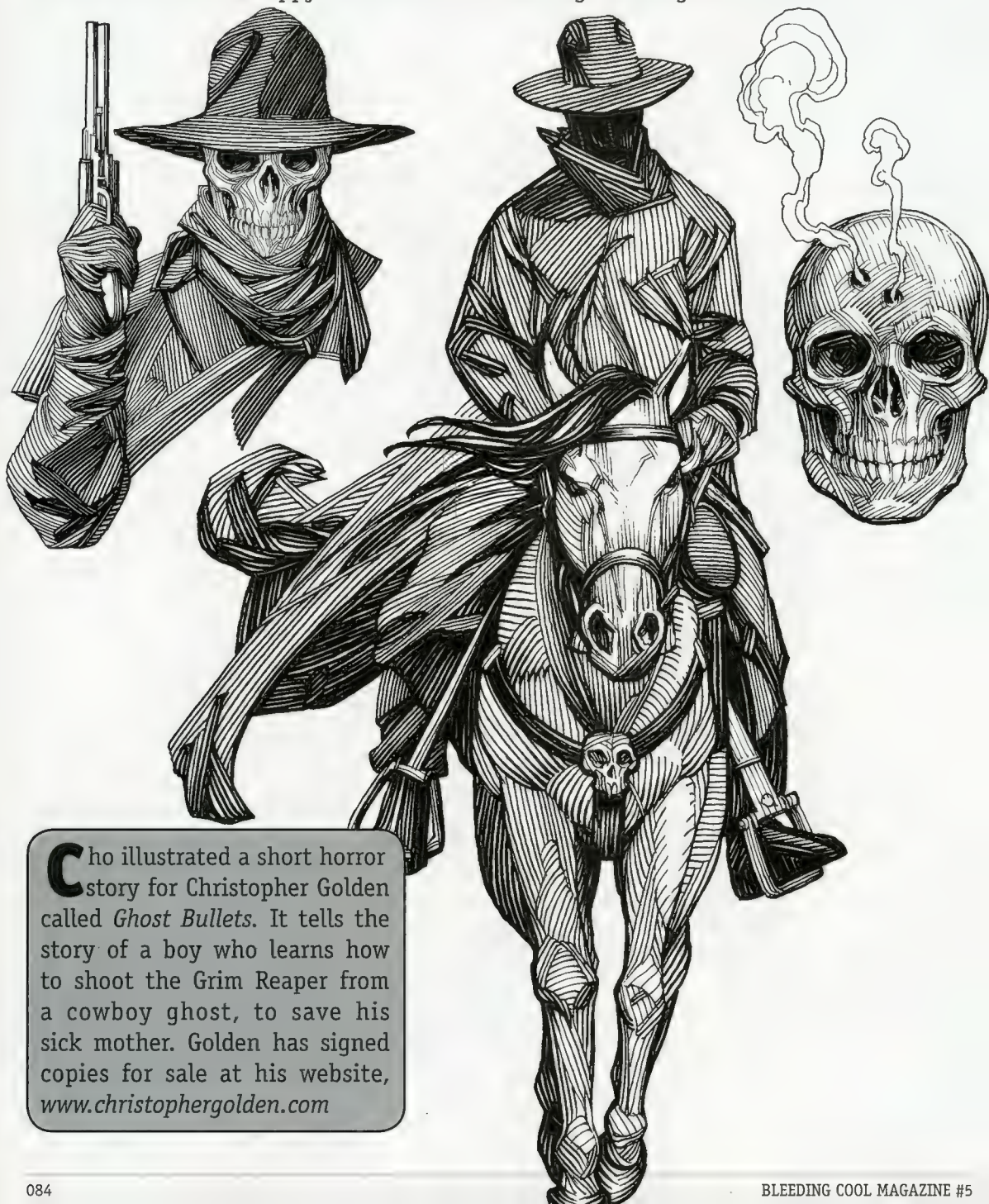
Captions by *Rich Johnston*



FRANK CHO GALLERY

Captions by Rich Johnston

Welcome to the Frank Cho gallery. No other name in comics simultaneously evokes the same reverence for beautifully illustrated women and monkeys like Cho. Whether it is at the helm of his fan favorite *Liberty Meadows* comic strip or drawing the latest sexy super heroines, his incredibly clean lines and cheesecake style have become a staple in comic shops. We had an opportunity to get a behind the scenes look at some of Frank's fantastic art and are happy to share it with *Bleeding Cool Magazine* readers.



Cho illustrated a short horror story for Christopher Golden called *Ghost Bullets*. It tells the story of a boy who learns how to shoot the Grim Reaper from a cowboy ghost, to save his sick mother. Golden has signed copies for sale at his website, www.christophergolden.com



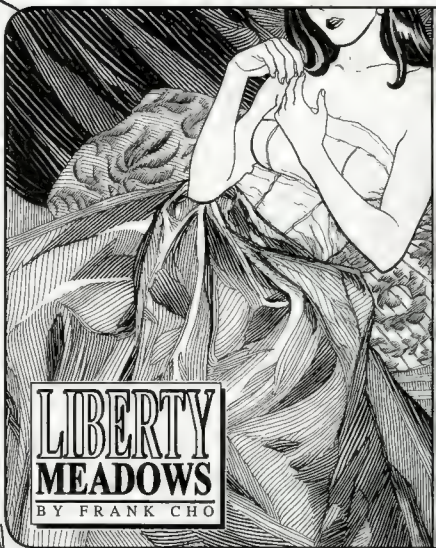
Frank Cho has quite the reputation for drawing women of the Tarzan variety. It is a very easy way to present reasonable explanations as to why the main character is running around in something akin to underwear. It's almost as if it excuses the reader.





Savage Wolverine fighting savages. Cho excels at this kind of action shot, one person against a multitude, and he specifically goes out of his way to give a similar looking crowd differences in expression and posture, letting the reader explore the art, creating their own mini-stories.

From *Liberty Meadows*, Frank uses a number of styles here, the simple strong line of the cartoon character, a lighter simple line for Brandy's features, and then the woodcut hatching for Brandy's dress and the world around her. Silhouettes for the trees, empty space for the sky, it's a yin/yang balanced piece.





That's less so here where there's more of the clear white bursting through the dark complexity. And featuring a rather entertaining, mundane, explanation for that.



No need for shading here, the piece will be coloured. Notice how not just the characters but also the smoke is leaning forward, left to right, giving the impression of movement, pressure, towards our heroes. And just how beautifully crafted it all is.





There's a trope involving cheesecake girl imagery in which the subject is being clumsy, dropping, spilling, knocking over... it's a way to make the impossibly beautiful feel suddenly human and relatable.

Franks uses distinct styles to separate out the content again, here giving us two layers, two levels, both physically and in society. The servants are blindfolded, but they are also in a different plane of existence to the Queen. As should be fit and proper.



A detailed black and white line drawing of a T-Rex in a cage. The T-Rex is the central figure, looking towards the viewer with its mouth slightly open, showing sharp teeth. It is surrounded by other T-Rexes in the background. In the foreground, a person wearing a helmet and a tactical vest is seen from behind, looking into the cage. The cage is made of a chain-link fence. The sky is visible with some birds flying. A speech bubble from the person in the foreground says "OH SHIT." A text box in the upper right corner contains promotional text for a comic book. A "TO BE CONTINUED..." box is at the bottom right.

Guns And Dinos is Frank Cho's upcoming and much delayed Image comic book. It features, surprisingly, both guns and dinosaurs. And time travel.

OH SHIT.

TO BE CONTINUED...

VINTAGE PAPER CHASE

by Mark Seifert & William Christensen

"One" isn't the loneliest number when it comes to comic book collecting. Quite the opposite in fact—it's the most popular number. Even non-collecting civilians have known that for a few decades now.

It hasn't always been true. Number ones have had their ups and downs among comic publishers since the the 1930s. At the dawn of the Golden Age, publishers were sometimes unsure about how the launch of a new series would be received, and going back to press was occasionally necessary (*Superman #1* is a prominent example of a Golden Age comic with multiple printings). In the Silver Age, DC Comics thought that a new, untested series might inspire such a lack of confidence among newsstand browsers that they'd sometimes leave the #1 off of the cover. But by the Bronze Age of the 1970s, publishers were prominently drawing attention to their new first issues with "Fabulous First Issue!" and the like bursting from their covers.

They'd finally figured out what collectors had been telling them during the previous decade—numbers are important. And if you're buying a series you like, eventually you want to go back to that first number.

GOLDEN AGE

Vintage Paper's #1 theme this time around was inspired by the recent sale of *Superman #1* CGC 1.8 at Comiclink for \$53,510—a rather remarkable rise over the \$28,000 that the same copy sold for in 2010, particularly for a comic in low (through

presentable) grade.

Conventional wisdom in the post-2010 era of million-dollar *Action #1*s and *Detective #27*s has held that collectors might move to lock down a copy of their more affordable counterparts — relatively speaking — in *Superman #1* and *Batman #1* before they too moved out of reach. Even in low grade, both comics have been on a rapid rise since then, with prices over the past few months including *Batman #1* CGC 3.5 for \$48,500, CGC 1.8 for \$15,535, and CGC 1.5 for \$18,900. Recent *Superman #1* prices have included CGC 1.5 for \$44,500, and CGC 1.0 for \$20,500.

Looking for a Golden Age #1 that a mere mortal can afford? *Marvel Family #1* (first Black Adam) can be had for a few hundred bucks in all but the highest of grades, and *Military Comics #1* (first Blackhawk) isn't all that much more with a nice-looking CGC 6.5 going for \$1850 recently. Both are solid Golden Age key #1's containing the first appearances of characters still important in the DCU today.



SILVER AGE



The Silver Age #1 landscape is largely dominated by the earliest Marvel Universe first issues: *Fantastic Four* #1, *Amazing Spider-Man* #1, *Hulk* #1, *X-Men* #1, and *Avengers* #1. All of these trade hands in significant volume every month, and are not hard to get if you're willing to pay the price. *X-Men* #1 and *Avengers* #1 are a bit later and much more common than the other Marvel foundational books, and it's worth noting that even after the run-up of *Avengers* #1 for the film, it's still the cheapest of all of these. Given the monumental importance of that franchise for the next few years at least, if you wanted to grab one book from this group now, *Avengers* #1 would be the one. Raw VG-range copies can still be had for around the \$1200 mark.

Speaking of Marvel groups on the rise, let's give a quick shout-out for the 1968 *Nick Fury Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* #1. It's not a first appearance, and it's not that tough to get compared to the early-1960s Marvels, but it is 45 years old now, and the first #1 for a

very important Marvel franchise. CGC 9.0s around the \$150 mark sure seems cheap for this book.

BRONZE AGE

We could spend an entire column talking about Bronze Age Marvel #1s worth watching — from longtime 1970s staple keys such as *Giant Size X-Men* #1 and *Star Wars* #1, to books attracting renewed interest like *Hero for Hire* #1 and *Ms Marvel* #1 — but with all the cosmic energy flying around the Marvel Universe on both the comic and film sides, we'll close out with a 1970s book which appears to be a strong focus of collector attention right now: *Nova* #1. A CGC 9.8 copy recently sold for \$500, and even unslabbed high-grades can top \$100.



THE FUTURE OF VINTAGE PAPER

Do you know of any vintage comic sales of note? Are you an experienced dealer or collector who wants to contribute info? Let us know at: vintage-paper@bleedingcool.com.

FIVE WAYS TO MAKE MONEY FAST AT SDCC!

by Rich Johnston

It costs a lot to attend the San Diego Comic Con. Hotels, tickets, flights, Pedi cabs; you're looking at a four figure sum straight up. So how about finding ways to make some of it back? Here are five tried and tested ways to make the pain of paying go away...

1 Look for exclusive toys that will only be made available at the show. So if someone is stuck in Poughkeepsie, you can make their dreams come true by selling them one. Run the second the show opens, preview night for preference, join the queue that somehow formed before the doors even opened and buy them. Lego, Hasbro, Mattel, Diamond Direct, get them and flip them on eBay ASAP. Some enterprising fellows get pre-orders from people online and then run around trying to fulfil them. Look to double, triple, or quadruple your money with ease. A My Little Pony Derpy exclusive from last year cost \$19.99 in person. But one just sold on eBay for \$120. If you bought two, that's a \$200 profit from just standing in line. Do that five or six times throughout the show and your costs will be covered.



2 Be on the hunt for the signed exclusive comic. From the big boys to the small press, people debut comic books at the show, often with a show exclusive cover. Get that bad boy signed by the creators involved, sketched even, and to eBay with you. Remember, the Wi-Fi is decent enough on the show floor so as to make sure your copy gets online for sale straight away. The Image booth is always good for this; they have in demand exclusive stuff without the huge queues – unless you're by *The Walking Dead*. Check out the creator tables that surround the Image booth and it could pay for your show in one visit. John Layman and Rob Guillory for preference... check out their "Kill Bill" variant cover for this year's San Diego edition of *Chew*. But also look for Boom for *Adventure Time* and *Regular Show*, Oni for *Scott Pilgrim*, and Avatar for *Uber*. Especially get grabby for comics handed out as part of a stunt. *The Walking Dead* #100 exclusive handed out during the PetCo Park live zombie event last year is a classic example of that, and it goes for \$45 right now.

3 And then there's the back breaker. There will be something at the show so big, so heavy, and so impractical that demand could skyrocket. From the *Bone One* hardcover, to the Massive Battlestar Galactica toy, to the IDW Artist Editions, there will be something. And as long as it doesn't take you over your luggage allowance, it could be very profitable indeed. You'll spend a lot, but only have to line up once. The Shield Helicarrier from last year would have cost you \$130, but sells now for \$300 easily. Though the week after the show it was fetching \$500.

For all the above, the trick is identifying the franchise, the creator, the comic, or the toy line for which there is most demand – and limited supply. And then strike, like the Swaggenaut you know you can be.

4 Get a big bag o' free stuff. One of those people sized bags that Warner Bros give out for free? Stuff it with flyers, ashcans, samples, free masks, and free headgear, anything given out free inside and outside of the show, including the *True Blood* sign

on your hotel room door handle. Put it all in the bag and go, you guessed it, straight to eBay. Each bag full of free stuff could fetch \$50 to \$100 without difficulty. That much cash could buy you a whole pretzel on the show floor...

5 Kidnap Wil Wheaton. Wil is now an accomplished stand-up comedian, cult figure, and all round good egg. If you kidnapped him and held him for ransom, the internet would Kickstarter a seven figure sum in an afternoon for his safe release. I walked past him at Phoenix Comic Con, all I needed was a disguise and a getaway van and I'd have been a millionaire. Don't let opportunity pass you by; everyone's in disguise at the show, and a getaway Padi cab would do the business. Just hang outside the Omni hotel and hope. (*Ed. note: Do not kidnap anyone please*)

Don't kidnap Chris Hardwick however. You'll end up having to pay BBC America to take him back off your hands.



PRICE GUIDE

for Collectors and Sellers



Welcome to the Bleeding Cool Price Guide. This is a snippet of the kind of prices comics are selling for on the open market. Rich Johnston scoured the web and thousands of online auction listings to provide this snapshot of comic book sales. A price listed here is no guarantee you'll be able to sell yours for that price, but it might give you an idea of what someone, somewhere, is willing to pay! Retailers who would like to become part of an advisory board for the Price Guide feature should contact Jim Kuhoric via email: jimkuhhoric@bleedingcool.com

KEEPING AN EYE ON ANGELA

Angela	
1	\$8.00
2	\$9.00
3	\$4.00

Angela Pirate Spawn Promo

0	\$18.00
Aria Angela	\$10.00

Spawn

9	\$50.00
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SOME IMAGE COMICS CAN'T STAY ON THE SHELVES... AND SOME CAN

Bounce

1	\$6.00
1 2nd print	\$3.00

1 Forbidden Planet	\$15.00
1 Retailer	\$20.00

Chin Music

1	\$6.00
1	\$78.00
1 Variant	\$13.00

East Of West

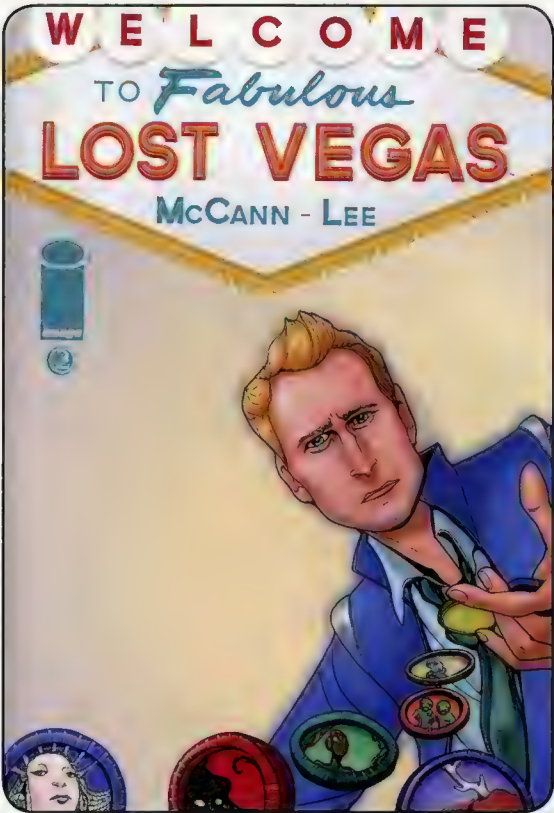
1	\$21.00
1 Forbidden Planet	\$35.00
1 RRP	\$206.00
1 Ghost	\$34.00
1 2nd print	\$6.00
1 3rd print	\$5.00
2	\$6.00
3	\$3.00
4	\$4.00



Five Ghosts

1	\$10.00
1 ECCC	\$130.00
1 Phantom	\$20.00
1 2nd print	\$8.00
2	\$7.00
2 Phantom Variant	\$14.00

2 2nd print	\$3.00	1 3rd print	\$4.00
3	\$3.00	1 4th print	\$6.00
3 Phantom Variant	\$14.00	2	\$29.00
Five Weapons		2 2nd print	\$5.00
1	\$12.00	3	\$14.00
1 2nd print	\$3.00	3 2nd print	\$7.00
2	\$3.50	3 3rd print	\$3.00
		4	\$7.00
		4 2nd print	\$3.00
		5	\$5.00
		6	\$3.00



Lost Vegas	
1	\$6.00
1 ECCC	\$51.00
1 Phantom	\$16.00
1 Variant	\$14.00
2	\$3.00
2 Phantom	\$13.00
2 Variant	\$8.00
3	\$3.00
3 Phantom	\$8.00
3 Variant	\$6.00

Nowhere Men	
1	\$40.00
1 CBLDF Portland Wizard World	\$115.00
1 ComicsPRO	\$140.00
1 Thought Bubble	\$185.00
1 2nd print	\$20.00



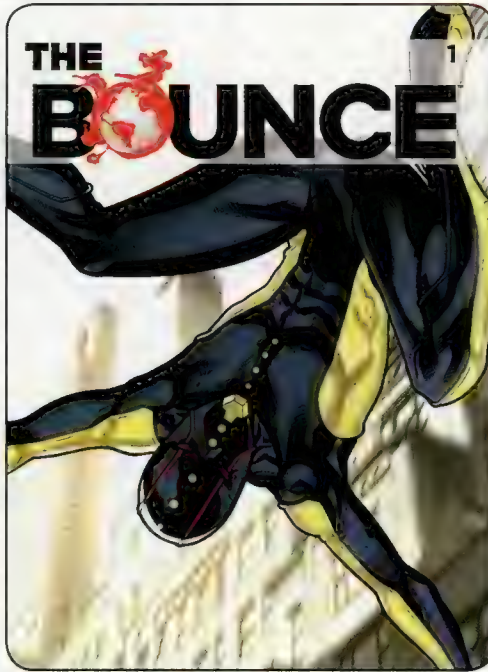
Peter Panzerfaust	
1	\$430.00
1 2nd print	\$51.00
1 Image Firsts	\$5.00
2	\$153.00
2 2nd print	\$15.00
3	\$45.00
4	\$40.00
5	\$31.00
6	\$42.00
7	\$30.00
7 2nd print	\$5.00
8	\$50.00
8 2nd print	\$10.00
9	\$35.00

9 2nd print	\$10.00
10	\$15.00
10 Sketch	\$25.00
10 2nd print	\$12.00
10 RRP	\$150.00
11	\$8.00
11 Variant	\$37.00
Green Wake 7	\$30.00
Morning Glories 14	\$17.00

Revival

1	\$48.00
1 Third Eye	\$50.00
1 2nd print	\$11.00

1 3rd print	\$5.00
1 Sketch	\$125.00
1 Variant	\$60.00
2	\$17.00
2 2nd print	\$15.00
2 Phantom	\$13.00
3	\$15.00
3 Phantom	\$13.00
4	\$9.00
4 Phantom	\$13.00
5	\$8.00
5 Phantom	\$13.00
6	\$12.00
7 Phantom	\$13.00
8	\$5.00
8 Phantom	\$13.00
9	\$3.00
9 C2E2	\$40.00
9 Phantom	\$13.00



Sex

1	\$6.00
1 ECCC	\$101.00
2	\$3.00
3	\$3.00

Snapshot

1	\$6.00
1 Forbidden Planet	\$10.00
2	\$3.00
Judge Dredd 322	\$6.00

Ten Grand

1	\$3.00
1 C2E2	\$92.00
1 Dynamic	\$20.00
1 Forbidden Planet	\$26.00

1 Mile High	\$29.00
1 Phantom	\$27.00
1 Variant	\$5.00

Todd, The Ugliest Kid On Earth

1	\$26.00
1 2nd print	\$9.00
2	\$9.00
3	\$3.00
4	\$3.00

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0 Propaganda	\$19.00
0 Regular	\$20.00
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0 Forbidden Planet	\$20.00
0 Midtown	\$15.00
1 Blitzkrieg	\$14.00
1 Propaganda	\$25.00
1 Regular	\$14.00
1 Retailer	\$50.00
1 Wrap	\$6.00
1 Apocalypse	\$14.00
1 Art Nouveau	\$15.00
1 First Appearance: HMH	
Colossus	\$12.00
1 Forbidden Planet	\$13.00
1 Midtown	\$12.00

The Wake

1	\$4.00
1 Variant	\$25.00

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Star Wars	\$9.00
Superman	\$10.00
The Strangers	\$13.00
The Walking Dead	\$10.00
Ugly Doll Comics	\$10.00

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Dark Horse San Diego Comic Con #2 \$100.00
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Dark Horse San Diego Comic Con #3 \$10.00

1995

Callipe Comics Presents Musings #4 \$4.00

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Heroes Return \$5.00

1998

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Dark Chylde \$7.00
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2002

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Chris Sanders Sketchbook \$77.00
Art Adams Sketchbook \$59.00
Mike Mignola Sketchbook \$32.00
Adam Hughes Sketchbook \$31.00
Jim Lee Sketchbook \$60.00
Whilce Portacio Sketchbook \$12.00
52 #1 \$2.00

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Valiant Sneak Peek \$25.00
Jim Lee Sketchbook \$70.00
Carlos D'Anda Sketchbook \$30.00
Aspen Swimsuit \$5.00
Witchblade #109 \$3.00
Pushing Daisies \$50.00

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Charismatic #6	\$25.00
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Mega Man	\$15.00
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2011

Chew #19	\$15.00
Chew Sketchbook	\$50.00
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Grimm Fairy Tales 61	\$200.00
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Trickster Sketchbook	\$41.00
Duck Tales #1	\$40.00
Soulfire	\$25.00
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Marvel Super Hero Squad	\$2.00
Grimm Fairy Tales Dream Eater Saga #6	\$18.00

Lady Death Dragon Wars #1	\$24.00
Chris Sanders Sketchbook	\$23.00
Bruce Timm Naughty And Nice Sketchbook	\$23.00

2012

Arsenic Lullaby	\$40.00
Walking Dead #100	\$50.00
Walking Dead #100 Escape	\$127.00
Walking Dead Compendium	\$226.00
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Secret Agent Poyo #1	\$40.00
Court Of The Owl Mask	\$40.00
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Glendale, AZ

- Jesse James Comics & Collectibles: Glendale, AZ
- Comic Madness: Chino, CA
- Super Heroes In Training: Escondido, CA
- I.E. Comics And Games: Hemet, CA
- The Comic Bug: Manhattan Beach, CA
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- The Comic Book Shop: Wilmington, DE
- Alley Cat Comics: Chicago, IL
- G-mart: Chicago, IL

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- Amazing Fantasy Comic Shop: Frankfort, IL
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• **Discount Comic Book Service:**
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- Creative Comics: Griffith, IN
- Comic Carnival: Indianapolis, IN
- Friendly Neighborhood Comics: Bellingham, MA
- Newbury Comics: Brighton, MA
- New England Comics: Brockton, MA
- Larry's Comics: Lowell, MA
- Harrison's Comics & Pop Culture: Woburn, MA

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- Comix Corner/East: Fraser, MI
- Source Comics & Games: Roseville, MN
- Newcastle Comics & Games: Maryland Hgts, MO
- Ultimate Comics: Chapel Hill, NC
- Mail Order Comics Inc: Omaha, NE
- Main Street Hobbies Inc: Milltown, NJ
- A & S Comics: North Bergen, NJ
- Astro Zombies: Albuquerque, NM
- Collector's Kingdom: Huntington Stat, NY
- Blu Planet Comics & Games: Massapequa, NY



Midtown Comics: New York, NY

- All Heroes Comics: Rochester, NY
- Alterniverse: Salt Point, NY
- Fourth World Comics: Smithtown, NY
- Rockin' Rooster: Cincinnati, OH
- Suds Media: Cleveland, OH
- Moore Comics: Westerville, OH
- The Cave: Ada, OK



Things From Another World: Milwaukie, OR

- Tm Cards: Allentown, PA
- Comic Collection: Feasterville, PA
- New Dimension Comics-cranberry: McMurray, PA
- Ontario Flea Market: Philadelphia, PA
- America's Most Wanted Collectibles: Williamsport, PA
- Metro Comics: Guaynabo, PR
- Apocalypse Comics: N Myrtle Beach, SC
- Soundwave Music Comics & More: Summerville, SC
- Comics Exchange: Knoxville, TN
- Lone Star: Arlington, TX
- Night Flight: Salt Lake City, UT
- Atlas Comics: Charlottesville, VA
- Untamed Worlds: Lynchburg, VA
- Four Color Fantasies: Winchester, VA
- Painted Visions Comics & Cards: Woodbridge, VA
- Docking Bay 93: Mt Vernon, WA
- The Westfield Company: Middleton, WI

Canada

- Red Nails II: Toronto, ON
- The Ashworth Group Inc: Elmvale, ON
- The Beguiling: Toronto, ON
- Distribution Universe: St. Laurent, QC
- La Boite A B De Laval: Laval, QC

United Kingdom

- Forbidden Planet Int'l: Glasgow
- Whatever Comics: Canterbury, Kent
- A Place In Space: Surrey
- Planet Ace Ltd T/A Ace Comics: Colchester
- Orbital Comics Ltd: London
- Excelsior Comics Limited: Bristol

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- Hade Gmbh: Osnabruck, Germany

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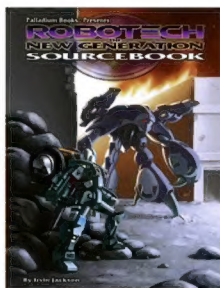
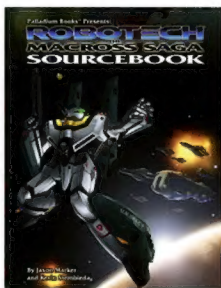
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